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The Sociological & Psychological Impact Of Reality-Based Television On The American Culture

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**THE SOCIOLOGICAL & PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT OF REALITY-BASED
TELEVISION ON THE AMERICAN CULTURE**

**BY
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**Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts in
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Seton Hall University
South Orange, New Jersey**

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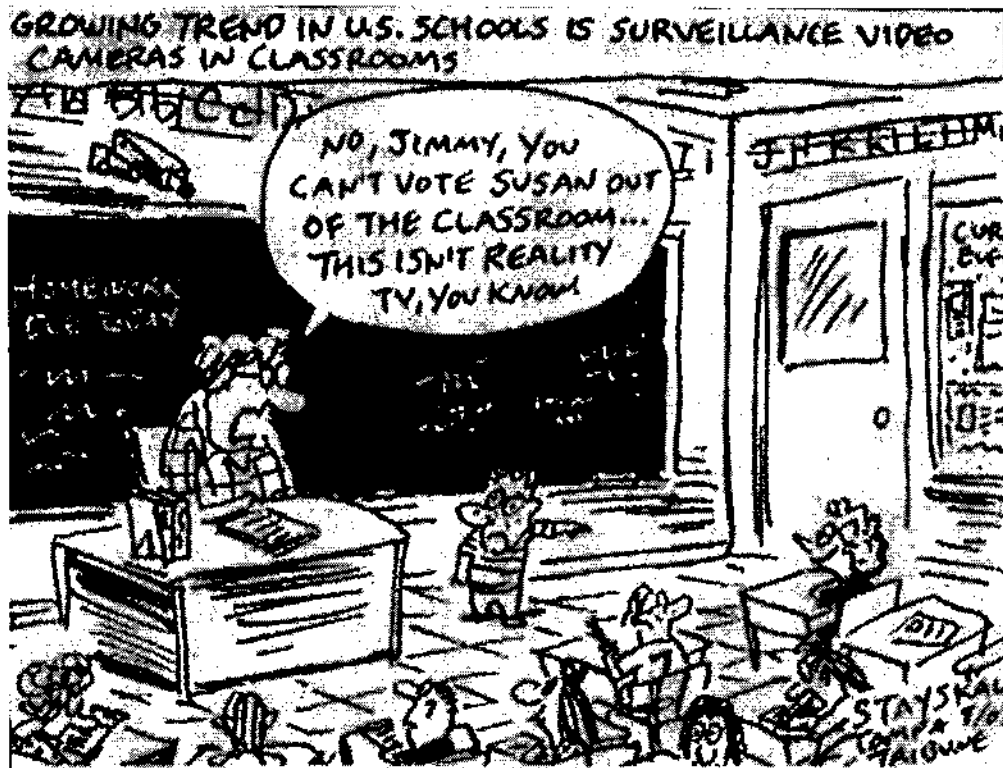
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Source: *The Setonian*, September 4, 2003

CHAPTER ONE

WHY REALITY TV?

An Introduction

“Reality is becoming stranger than fiction”

The summer of 2003 defined a genre of television programming that took not only America but the world by storm. Reality TV has invaded every aspect of our daily lives and has in its wake produced an impact on our culture that could possibly shape the way the future is unfurled. This past summer, the hold that Reality TV has tightened around our society was told through statistics that speak mountains for themselves. Five out of the top seven shows in the summer Nielson Ratings were Reality TV shows. Do you wonder what the other two were? *CSI* and *Friends*; one show fits into the category of and can be referred to as “pseudo-reality shows” mainly due to their “ripped from the headlines” story lines and their scripted dialogue that is delivered by professional actors playing a carefully contrived and molded character. The other show is our old-time sitcom that we have been watching for nine years focused on twenty-something singles trying to get by in the big city; a popular storyline in modern day American pop culture.

The onslaught of reality-based programming has set the networks into a frenzy. Now, everyone is looking for a reality-based plot in order to rake in the viewers. And they are doing it with the foremost style of message communication, using the television as a mass means of communication and profit-oriented success.

Television has always been an integral part of the American culture. From dramas such as *ER* and *NYPD Blue*, to comedies such as *Friends* and *Will & Grace*, television has provided the mass society with a release from the everyday reality and in some way or another; a form of entertainment. Since the transmission of the first electronic

television picture, the American public has been drawn to this form of communication media.

A typical morning for most Americans can be waking up, getting dressed, making the coffee and turning on the morning news. At the end of the day we partake in the same style of ritual; the television making background noise for our children playing on the rug in front of it or the English teacher grading his students' midterm examinations while a football game carries on in the distance of his direct attention. The television, not only a piece of furniture, is a tool of communication, a voice in a silent house, and a friend in a time of crisis. When we are sad, we relate to the boyfriend trouble our favorite character on our favorite soap is having. When we are happy, we laugh out loud to the ridiculous antics of our favorite sitcom stars. When we want information, we turn on the television to the five o'clock news. It's always there for us whenever we need it and its transformation of projected material can have and has had a certain implication on our society.

In 1992, MTV piloted the television market into a previously unexplored area of entertainment. The launching of *The Real World*, a show about seven strangers required to live under one roof for seven months while their every interaction is documented on camera, catapulted MTV into the mainstream. Everyone knew what the show was about; it became lunchtime chatter and water cooler gossip. At the time, it was a new and refreshing addition to the primetime lineup of networked produced dramas and sitcoms that brought the cable network into everyone's vocabulary. Although the edgy, Generation X-type program fit MTV's personality, they became a platform for others to mimic. What MTV didn't realize was the phenomenon that they would eventually

become the pioneers in creating. In the wake of *The Real World*, we have seen an increasing amount of programs that attempt to chronicle human behavior, the good, the bad and the ugly. These programs have evolved to include competitive type shows, human interaction shows and dating shows. All of these programs form a part of pop culture we now refer to simply as Reality TV.

So why is there such an interest in this new form of entertainment? Is it for the drama or is it the scandal or is it for the comedic element of its “characters”? Reality TV can be described as a new form of information communication. It is in the basis of its foundation that we pull out solutions to our own problems and take note on how to handle certain aspects of human relationships, or is it? Our culture is bombarded on a regular basis with external forces breathing information into our brains. We find ourselves attracted to things that we simply can’t explain and there in turn don’t bother to try. Reality TV has become such a forceful element in our arsenal of forced information, it seems almost impossible to escape. During the summer of 2003, there were approximately sixty-two reality-based television programs on cable and networked television with twenty of these shows being romance-based reality shows.

So that brings us to this question; what makes America watch? Why do we find ourselves in front of the television while *The Bachelor* is presenting his final rose and we dare not turn the channel? These are questions among others that the author will attempt to explore through the duration of this study.

The Purpose of the Study

I have never been much of a television fan. The fact that I am even writing on the subject will boggle the minds of most. I have my certain days of regular viewing – Thursday and “Must See TV” on NBC – and I have my regular shows – *Friends*, *Will & Grace* and *Scrubs*, in that order. Other than these shows it is difficult to find me in front of a television watching anything for longer than a half an hour. If I am, I am watching a football or hockey game. Last spring, however, I found myself rushing home from work and throwing homework aside for one solid hour in order to catch a glimpse of Andrew Firestone and the slowly dwindling herd of twenty-five lucky or unlucky ladies. I watched these women make fools of themselves on horseback, exploit their valley-girl accents and watched in horror as looks of death were shot across the room. I found myself laughing and crying all at one time wondering what it was about this installment of *The Bachelor* that made me watch. Was it because he is cute? Was it because he is rich? Was it because he is one of America’s most eligible bachelors and he is looking for his soul-mate on TV? Or is it because I simply got a really good laugh at 25 women throwing themselves at a rather goofy young guy? This is the concept that started the thought process behind the question of what makes us really watch this stuff.

Then one night while lounging in a chair in my parent’s bedroom, I was enjoying a rare night of leisure reading with the television on merely for background noise, a staple of American culture, and my household is no different. Meanwhile, as the clock struck eight o’clock at night and the television warned of the up coming episode of *Fear Factor*, my two-year old niece Sophia entered the room with curious eyes. At the first glimpse of

the contestants vying for the final prize she positioned herself in front of the television immersed in what was unfolding before her eyes. As they began to consume worms, only on TV, I scrambled for the remote control in an attempt to shield her eyes from the gruesome acts of entertainment and competition. As I attempted to change the channel much to the dismay of the two-year little girl, she proceeded to throw a temper tantrum at the simple thought that I would dare to take this excitement away from her. So it stayed, worm eating and all.

Finally, the relief of a commercial break before her mother would enter the room. I thought that the child would be rested from the tainted factors television has cast upon her in a few short minutes. Then suddenly, an image was projected on the television screen that would not only bring laughter to everyone in the room but would also shape the very content of the purpose of this study. A candlelit room, decorated elegantly with flowers and simple furniture, a single podium sat to the left with a pile of red roses. A slew of women stared with intent and forced smiles as the camera perused the nervous group and finally fell to the man of the hour. The two-year old little girl bounded from her seated position, pointing to the screen and began to alert the entire household, “THE BACHELOR, THE BACHELOR, MAMA THE BACHELOR IS ON! HURRY, HURRY!” She screamed with the broken English of a young child learning to speak, her finger pointed intently towards her subject, her face lit up as if she just opened the largest Christmas present any child could possibly dream of. The simple image of her mother’s favorite show, she did not have to hear or even understand what the announcer was saying, she knew everything from the one image, a common image week after week, and the setting depicted the rose ceremony of the romance-based reality show *The Bachelor*.

A ceremony that takes place every week during the duration of the show where the “star” of the show presents a rose to every woman he wishes to keep “in the running” for his affection.

And so the ritual began every Wednesday night, three girls ranging in age from thirty-one to two years, a bowl of popcorn, two huge pillows and a quilted blanket. A ritual that stood through to the end when one of America’s most eligible bachelors, Andrew Firestone, chose his future bride, the quiet and reserved Jennifer Schefft. Why did we watch? Why did we discuss the outcome each week so intently? Was it because the nature of the show’s star? Was it because *The Bachelor* this time was the great-grandson of one of the most famous men in our history? These are questions that I hope to gain insight on through the course of this study.

Research Question: What do we want to know?

The purpose of this study having been explained brings me to many interesting points that will try to be explained and defined here. Through the course of conversations and research we want to explore what the sociological and the psychological impacts are that Reality TV has had and will have on the American culture. For the purpose of this study, I have narrowed down my focus to Romance-Based Reality TV shows. Whether it is sociological or psychological, or both, the impact of Reality TV; and in the same regard television, are important points to explore and understand.

I want to know how it affects young women that are dating age and younger. Do they begin to believe this is the only way to catch a man? Does it prove to them that

everything in life is a competition including dating? When young girls see these “average” women on television with their perfect hair, perfect make-up, and perfect clothes, what are we saying to them? Before, the discussion was “Well, of course! Demi Moore is perfect looking, she has the money to pay for the trainers and the chefs and the personal shopper and maybe even the plastic surgeon.” But we accept that she is perfect because we understand that she is a celebrity and the nature of her profession is to look perfect not to mention the fact that she has the means to do so. We try to set young girls’ minds at ease by telling them that the 6’3, 115 pound women on the cover of Cosmopolitan magazine are that thin and that beautiful because they can afford to be and because it is their job to be, and because airbrushing is a beautiful thing. Now, we have ordinary women, picked from ordinary towns and ordinary jobs that look exactly like the celebrities we try to convince ourselves are not really real.

The implications can be devastating as far as psychological contradictions are concerned and there is a lack of resources to define and explain them. Although we will not dare delve into a feminist argument of what these shows do for the reputation of women all over the world we need to understand that they do in fact put women in a vulnerable position time and time again. Only two prime-time Reality TV shows so far have put women in the driver’s seat; *The Bachelorette* and *For Love or Money 2*. Who were the two women in control? One was a former Miami Heat cheerleader; the other is the daughter of a former professional football player. What, if anything, does this tell our young women?

Reality TV was not always like this, however. In the beginning, the people were relatively normal. We had people of all shapes and sizes on the screen and we watched

them interact. Now, we have built a franchise of money-making hits, one after the other and the networks need to draw people in season after season. So if you cast a pretty girl opposite an even prettier girl with an attitude, you build interest in the conflict and the contradiction.

This leads us to another point of interest. We are by nature interested in aspects that contradict one another. It may even be safe to say that we are intrigued by the power of a debate. Our country has, unfortunately, witnessed Reality TV at its very worst. September 11, 2001 unfolded before our eyes on the medium that is television. This was as real as it gets but yet we still couldn't believe it. We watch the news on a daily basis and although it seems to become grimmer and grimmer with every waking moment, we still watch. Why? What draws us in? Reality TV draws us in with the notion that no matter who is on the screen, the drama that unfolds will hold us captive until there is a solution to the problem, a winner to the contest, or a heart broken with good intentions. The reality of these shows, maybe not so much of a reality, but it is a break from our own reality and therefore keeps us glued to the television set every night, week in and week out. In the wake of September 11, 2001, we saw a rise in the amount of reality-based shows that took to the airwaves. Was this our way of coping together? Was it our way of distracting ourselves from the actual reality that was happening on the next channel over?

Another aspect of examination is the sociological trampoline that Reality TV has created. For example, we will see that most of the people that have starred or have been cast in a Reality TV program have in some way gone on to careers or attempted careers in show business. Is this the new acting school? Is it the new way to "get noticed" and network with industry insiders? As a former stage actress throughout high school and

college, I know how difficult it is to get an acting gig and remain in the business in order to make a living out of it. The phenomena with Reality TV is it is basically doing what casting agencies have been doing for years, putting the prettiest and the best out there for casting directors to see. However, how much of the “acting” on these shows is real emotion or just a performance for notoriety? The contradiction within Reality TV itself is interesting. How “real” is it really? Most may recall on the third installment of *The Bachelor*, “Tina Fabulous” gave a fabulous performance. She drew viewers in with her cold-as-ice demeanor that had Andrew begging for more; well at least we thought he wanted more since he kept her around until the very end. Was she acting? Or is she just really that much of a hateful harridan? Her intentions after the show were to pursue a television career. Do you think she showed people in the business how marketable she can be? Or maybe the more important question here is where she is now?

The purpose of this study is to indeed ask that question. Along with all of the other questions, hopefully this study will shed light on this phenomenon that has captured our attention so intently. We will explore the beginnings of television up to the invasion of Reality TV to better understand the impact the medium has on our society. We will try to understand the importance of its message, whether conscious or subconscious in nature, and attempt to figure out what the lasting impact of that message might be.

Subsidiary Questions

In order to fully explore the research question mentioned above, the author will be examining many subsidiary questions related to this topic. Some have already been mentioned in the introduction to this topic.

1. What makes us watch?
2. What makes a 2-year old tune in?
3. Why is 2000-2003 primetime for Reality TV? Will this decade be defined by it?
4. What defines the culture of Reality TV fans?
5. What will happen to television after Reality TV's reign?
6. How do shows such as "The Real World" give us insight, if any, into behavior and how does it affect our society?
7. What message does it send to single young girls?
8. What are the direct and indirect impacts these shows have on women in general?
9. What makes one of the most eligible bachelors in America choose this method of finding his soul-mate?
10. What is the overall affect Romance-Based Reality TV shows have on how we interact with one another on a daily basis?

Limitations of the Study

The subject of Reality TV in America and abroad has become such a talked about subject and has even crossed lines in culture, class and language. The never-ending list of programs continues to grow while the media increases our focus and attention on every new show that arrives. Because this topic for research has such a broad range of material with exceptional depth it has required the author to place limitations on her study and research to a certain genre of shows and the implications that those shows have on our culture and our individual lives for the public in general and the viewers more specifically.

With that being said, it would be almost physically impossible to cover all genres and classes of reality television. For the purpose of this study, as mentioned a bit in the introduction, certain shows such as *The Real World* will be used as an example into the phenomena of Reality TV and as a starting point for the exploration of the culture it has created. Furthermore, such competition-based shows such as *Survivor* and *Fear Factor* will not be explored but the relationship-based competition shows such as *For Love or Money* will be studied and integrated into the sociological impact they have on dating issues and human behavior as it pertains to these types of interactions.

Although a brief history of the creation of television and the place it holds in our culture as well as the impact it has had on shaping our society will be analyzed and researched, the purpose of this study is not to provide a comprehensive history of television but to provide information so that an understanding of how Reality TV was

born can be explored. In addition, this study will not cover the potential of ratings and the fluctuation of consumer behavior.

Lastly, there are many shows on television presently that can be confused as Reality TV shows. As mentioned before, these shows fall into a category of “pseudo-reality based” programs. Shows such as *Law & Order* (and all of the spin-offs related to the main program such as *Criminal Intent* and *Special Victims Unit*) and *CSI (Crime Scene Investigation)* are samples of shows that fall into this category. Although their subject matter is sold and advertised as “ripped from the headlines” and thereby being based in reality, they are programs that are directed and produced as entertainment pieces with a written script. This script is acted out by professional performers that are hired through an audition process to portray the actions and emotions of a fictitious character. These actors are trained professionals that belong to some sort of professional organization such as the Screen Actors Guild; preventing them from being categorized as “ordinary” people or “real” characters. These shows are not defined as Reality-Based TV shows due to the nature of their content and the way they are produced and delivered to the viewing public.

Definition of Terms

Culture

Any significant group of people with a common focus, interest and/or set of objectives.

Demography

The statistical study of human populations.

Drama

A situation that involves conflict and builds to a climax.

FCC

Acronym for the Federal Communications Commission which was established by the Communications Act of 1934, it is charged with regulating interstate and international communications by radio, television, wire, satellite and cable.

Generation-X

The generation referring to people born in the USA and Canada between the early 1960's and the late 1970's. This generation follows the World War II Baby Boom.

Genre

A particular type or category of work. Type or class of something.

Pop Culture

(Popular Culture) Culture that we all have in common. The things, icons and artifacts in our daily lives that are shared by every member of our society. Pop Culture is "so much a part of our everyday life that we have to step back from doing it in order to see it." (Whetmore, 1979, pg. 274).

Nielson Ratings

Ratings in which television usage is measured. Conducted by Nielson Media Research, ratings are measured by the Nielson People Meter placed in randomly selected households in the 210 television markets across the country. This electronic device measures what channel is being watched and by whom. This data is collected in the local markets during the months of November, February, May and July. In the larger markets three more months are added in addition to the previously mentioned four: October, January and March. These months of data collection are referred to as "The Sweeps".

Reality TV

Television programs based on "real" characters that are documented or filmed carrying out their "normal" activities in a controlled and structured setting. Characters are selected through an audition process and placed accordingly. Reality TV programs can fall into four genres: Competition-based (i.e. *Survivor*, *Fear Factor*, *The Amazing Race*), Romance-based (i.e. *The Bachelor*, *The Bachelorette*, *For Love or Money*, *Joe Millionaire*), Relationship-Based (i.e. *The Real World*, *Newlyweds*, *Big Brother*) and Make-over (i.e. *Trading Spaces*, *Extreme Make-over*).

Relationship-Based Reality TV Shows

Relationship-Based Reality TV shows pertains to any programming that is advertised, sold and presented as a non-scripted show based on "live" and "real" relationships between serious characters that are selected through an audition process. The purpose of these shows is to document the interaction between complete strangers when placed in certain situations. These shows include but are not limited to: *The Real World*, *Big Brother*, *The Simple Life*, *Newlyweds*.

Romance-Based Reality TV Shows

Romance-Based Reality TV shows pertains to any programming that is advertised, sold and presented as a non-scripted show based on "live" and "real" relationships between serious characters that are selected through an audition process. The purpose of these shows is to find a "soul mate" and involve the possibility of a marriage proposal. These shows are presented as both competition (with some sort of prize involved such as money) or as simple elimination of the person who is not compatible to the person searching for a mate. These shows include but are not limited to: *The Bachelor*, *The Bachelorette*, *For Love or Money*, *Joe Millionaire*.

Sitcom

A scripted, network television program that is written with a comedic element of entertainment and delivered by a cast of professional actors.

Voyeurism

A person who derives sexual gratification from observing the naked bodies or sexual acts of others, especially from a secret vantage point. An obsessive observer of sordid or sensational subjects.

RCA

Acronym for the Radio Corporation of America. Established in 1919 it is credited with the pioneering efforts of launching the first television sets to be sold publicly in America.

Conclusion

Reality TV is a phenomenon that for the moment is here to stay. No matter how long it holds its spot in our everyday culture it can be described as a product of Americana. Growing so rapidly and so ferociously that we as a society have not really been able to figure out where it has come from and why it is here. However, in order to understand the impact that Reality TV has had and will have on our society we need to understand where it has come from and how it has grown from its foundation of good old fashioned television.

Television alone has become a staple of the American culture; it is a slice of Americana that we can not ignore. Its impact is profound when studying the psychological and sociological dynamics of our society and its study is necessary to understand and analyze the desires of the American public and the effect it has on our children. Television has grown from a means of communication to a force of entertainment, advertising and psychological manipulation. Referred to by many different nicknames such as “The Boob Tube”, “The Idiot Box” or even “The Magic Window”; the box in our living rooms and bedrooms is a pertinent, valuable and even detrimental aspect of our senses. Here we will explore its impact; from the very beginning.

CHAPTER TWO

TELEVISION:

A Slice of American Life

“Do you know we are ruled by TV.”
An American Prayer by Jim Morrison

Since the first transmission of an electronic television picture in 1927; the way we viewed the world would be changed forever. Television has become a major part of our daily lives that we notice every second it is on and every second it is off. It has artfully delivered laughs, tears and sighs, and it has intrinsically shaped not only the way we view the world, but even more, the way we view ourselves.

How many times have we been able to relate to Grace’s boyfriend problems or to Monica’s neurosis? How many celebrities on television, by playing characters in our favorite sitcom have altered trends in fashion, hair design and even sexual relations? The television and the programs it transmits our part of us and our mannerisms. Whether done consciously or unconsciously, we tend to schedule our private and sometimes professional lives around our favorite shows (you know you do). They allow us to get away from our own problems and stresses and we are transported to a world that is exciting, funny or dramatic. When we hear bad news, the television becomes a sort of confidante - a shoulder to cry on as well as a messenger.

The television has portrayed more vivid images than some would care to remember. Who could forget the little boy saluting his father’s passing coffin and everyone remembers where they were and what they were doing when the space shuttle shot to different corners of the sky. We can recall the eerie cadence of church bells as a horse drawn carriage carried the most infamous woman in the world to her funeral. And then came the worst reality of all, the very symbols of our economic strength and the elements that defined a city skyline came tumbling down before our very eyes. These

images are forever engrained in our minds and we were brought together in grief. We watched and continued to watch to see what would happen next. We watched praying that another survivor would be found. We watched and wondered how we would ever rebuild our buildings, our psyche and our lives. The news became the only way in which we could know who did this to us and what we were going to do in response to it. The television became another member of our family as we hung on every image and word that seeped from it somehow gaining comfort and resolve.

Would these events be as powerful in our memories if they were delivered to us as an auditory message? Probably not. We tend to remember more of what we see than of what we hear and most programmers and advertisers play on this aspect of human recording. The television has gone from an entertainment messenger to a manipulative sales pitch; but all in good taste. Television reaches more people at a given time than any other form of media communication. Since a viewer is watching a certain show, unless he or she is a channel surfer during the commercials, they are fed information and persuaded in one direction or another. Herein lays the power that is television.

The Invention and Innovation

There are many individuals that are credited with the invention of television. In 1923, Vladimir Zworykin invented the iconoscope tube and the kinescope which became the first elements of the modern television set. By 1925, Charles Jenkins, and American inventor successfully “transmitted a ten- minute movie a distance of five miles to a gathering of government officials in Washington, D.C.” (Von Schilling, pg 2, 2003) He predicted that it wouldn’t be long until we would be able to see historic events such as

inaugural ceremonies and sporting events on a small screen in the privacy of our own homes (Von Schilling, pg 2, 2003) and he was right but his form of technology was wrong. The images that he transmitted and attempted to sell to the American people were of mediocre quality and he only possessed a “experimental TV license which prohibited him from seeking commercial sponsors” (Von Schilling, pg 3, 2003). He was unable to advertise his own television sets anywhere and the US government refused to “endorse the Jenkins Television System” (Von Schilling, 2003). By 1932, his company had folded and was absorbed by the De Forest Radio Company. Both companies had been experimenting with television transmission at the same time but were unable to keep their business moving forward. The De Forest Radio Company was then acquired in 1933 by the largest radio company in America at the time, the Radio Corporation of America.

In 1939, the concept of the television set came to New York at the World’s Fair where the Radio Corporation of America (RCA) was showcasing their television sets for the first time to the American public. This was a prime setting to display their new work of art and promote the brilliance of a new technology. The World’s Fair was visited by more than 20 million Americans that year in addition to the one thousand or more viewers that Macy’s reported having passing by their TV demonstrations for the first public sale of the television set (Von Schilling, 2003).

The introduction of this new technology came at a bad time for Americans. It was 1939 and the Great Depression was still a burden to the American people and the economic status of the country was in turmoil. A television set at the time was considered a luxury and a product of the wealthy with a new set costing nearly \$500 (Von Schilling, 2003). Although the concept was a fresh new introduction to the people of America and

therefore everyone seemed to jump on television's bandwagon, it did not receive widespread acceptance until the early 1950s (Von Schilling, 2003) when Lucille Ball graced our screens with her timeless awkwardness and precisely-timed comedic wit. Still, during television's first few years being introduced into our culture, it had its competition. Radio was accessible to everyone, wealthy and poor; Hollywood was doing well with the release of films such as *Gone With the Wind*, *The Wizard of Oz*, *Wuthering Heights* and *Stagecoach* (Von Schilling, pg. 11, 2003) and RCA was spending more money to produce television programs than they were getting back in television sales. The future of this new phenomenon hung in the balance.

A forceful giant was awakened in the wake of a new marketing program launched by RCA to increase the amount of television sets sold. In an attempt to increase profit from the sale of television sets and thereby save this new technology, RCA launched a marketing campaign the federal government became a crucial aspect in the growth of American Television. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) released their first report on television broadcasting in November of 1939. In this report, the Commission voiced their concerns about the economic status of television and sighted the costly disadvantages of the television industry up to this point. Since the FCC had no plans to support the television industry with the financial backing it needed to create, maintain and promote stations and programs, and since there were no sponsorships yet in television as there were in Britain; they warned RCA that the company simply needed to sell more television sets in order to survive. However, due to RCA's jump on the competition, there was a concern in the federal government that a monopoly may be in the making.

At the time the first report on television from the FCC was published, Larry Fly was the appointed chairman of the FCC under the Roosevelt Administration. He adopted a new policy that gave RCA the “amber light” to “proceed only with caution in marketing TV sets beyond Newburgh” (Von Schilling, pg. 14, 2003). This policy also included a “green light” – where the FCC would have the power to grant commercial licenses to sponsors of television programs and it would also provide advertising capabilities to television sponsors – and a “red light” which would have kept sponsors out of television completely.

The first commercial license was granted in 1941 to a Milwaukee newspaper that we one of the many who finally realized the great potential of this new medium. The FCC proceeded with caution by only granting nine commercial licenses at that time (Whetmore, pg. 142, 1979). By 1948, the FCC was overwhelmed by applications requesting these commercial licenses that it had to put a temporary freeze in granting them. Television had grown so effectively that its expansion began to prove radio obsolete; a phenomena no one could predict not even a reporter from the New York Times who stated on March 19, 1939 that “The problem with television is that people must sit and keep their eyes glued on a screen; the average American family hasn’t time for it. Therefore, the showmen are convinced that for this reason, if no other, television will never be a serious competitor of broadcasting.” But it was becoming a huge competitor and would soon classify radio not as the main source for communication in America but now as something Americans would only listen to in the car on their way to work.

The Evolution and Emergence

Television has evolved from “new technology” to the prime source for communications, advertising, and marketing. By the time the mid-1960s rolled around, there were more than 600 stations on the air. By the 1970s, that number grew to 1,000 stations live on the air (Whetmore, pg. 144, 1979). The American people bought the new phenomenon. In 1978, the *Broadcasting Yearbook* reported that 97% of all American households now owned at least one television set.

By 1993, television had reached a grand-scale market. Approximately 57.7 million households subscribed to cable alone (Himmelstein, pg. xi, 1994). Today, there are approximately 100.8 million TV households in the United States with the numbers being broken down demographically according to the following:

Figure 2.1 Projected Demographic Estimates for January 2000

	1998-1999	1999 - 2000
Demographic	(in thousands)	(in thousands)
Women 18+	101,700	103,010
Men 18+	93,360	94,660
Teens 12-17	22,140	22,450
Children 2-11	39,430	39,810

Source: Nielson Media Research Demographic Estimates Projected for January 2000.

Women & Television

As the numbers in Figure 2.1 indicate, there is a strong demographic of women watching television. So what are they watching? Our society, for the most part, has always put the woman in the caregiver role of the household. In the past the woman was the person that stayed home and took care of the house and the children while her husband worked in an office. Even still, with women becoming more and more a part of the professional workforce, there is still that essence of “the old days” and the woman is not only the professional now but she still holds the role of the caregiver and must manage to balance between the two.

As mentioned previously, there was a time in American broadcasting when getting a license to advertise your product was quite difficult. Now, one-third of all American programming is dedicated to advertising of some sort (Kaufman, 2001). Whether it is products or station programs and promotions, television has become a communication for promoting and advertising their products. The best way to do this became the television since so many prospective customers could be reached at one given time. The concept worked perfectly since the person at home watching the television was and is usually the woman of the house.

Even television shows were geared more towards the female consumer. Shows would be aired in the middle of the day and would focus on a different skill that a woman could use to aid her caring for her husband and her family. In the 1940s, many television shows could be defined to belong to the “homemaker genre” because of their basis to educate the homemaker and make her a better keeper of the household. Fashion-based

shows as well as talk shows also were designed to attract a wide female audience. These shows would be televised at night at first for networks to understand better when the women would be watching during the day since the radio still dominated the daytime airwaves. Women tuned in to game shows, talk shows and soap operas while going about their daily chores of cleaning and cooking.

Television reflects the mood and the state of our society. Shows pertaining to women were no different. Starting with the housewife and the desire to learn new skills in the kitchen, televisions programs were built around such topics. As women entered the workforce, programs mirrored the social upheaval that these women were experiencing (Von Schilling, pg. 89, 2003). In the 1940s we had programs such as *In the Kelvinator Kitchen* until we moved into such shows as *That Girl* in the 1960s, *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* in the 1970s and *One Day at a Time* in the 1980s (Heide, pg. 1, 1995). Today we are witnessing another shift in the portrayal of women on the small screen as Agent Scully of the *X-Files* paved the way in the 1990s for the strong and physical yet very feminine working woman of the new millennium.

These programs, although making the transition along with society, also offer the same conflicts of social order that have always been prevalent in the relationship between men and women and their roles in society and the household. Men have been primarily categorized in the public sphere of the professional workforce whereas women have been put into the private sphere of the home (Heide, pg. 1, 1995). The television serves as some sort of a battleground for the arguments of gender and family status. The woman is portrayed as the one that wants it all and can have it all with the perfect husband. But how accurate is this portrayal; after all, its quite easy to have the family, the house, the

job and the recreational activities when you have a stage crew of about 200 people doing it for you; well, and because it not real life. So even though television has moved with the times and has given women proper attention on the air, the struggles and conflicts portrayed cause confusion and even more conflict. The characters portrayed strike a harsh cord balancing between femininity and professionalism. If a woman wants both she couldn't possibly have a family too. A relief to television viewers all over, including the author, that we now have shows such as *Alias* and we had characters such as Dana Scully.

One aspect of women in television that is still a large negative influence, especially on young women is the sexual encounters and exploitation of women. When we talk about Reality TV in Chapter Three, this becomes an important issue to look at when studying the impact these shows have on our culture. A lot of times in network television, women are portrayed as sexual objects of desire and nothing more. Soap Operas are the prime culprit of this with pretty much all of the female characters walking around always looking beautiful and always showing a little bit of cleavage. Even worse are shows such as *Miami Vice* that intercut sex with acts of violence (Chunovic, pg. 99, 2000); and all of these scenes are made to look enticing.

In American culture, we are told to always look our best. The celebrities that we idolize are beautiful people, nothing like the people we see on the street everyday. On television they don't have to go to the bathroom before they leave on a road trip and they don't have problems with pimples or bad breath. They are perfect, beautiful people that never age and never have bills to pay. This is can have an explosive effect on women, especially young women. We are forced to see one beautiful person after another on television and in movies with this type of repetition and with the admiration these stars

get from the media and beyond it is no wonder that we start believing that we have to look like that to be successful and happy. For women, this leads to eating disorders and clinical depression. We all want to be thin and beautiful, but for some of us it is not possible to be as thin as Calista Flockhart. But yet we are told that this is what is beautiful. Although, it doesn't seem possible or inviting to not be able to hold up a tiny little purse at the Oscars because it is actually bigger than the whole person. Yet, we tell ourselves that if we are not bone-thin, with a large bust line then we are not good enough.

Reality TV has only made this perception worse. We try to tell our young women that to be you is to be great and to be beautiful. We try to differentiate between a celebrity who is airbrushed in all the photos she is seen in and that is why she looks perfect, and the average everyday woman who puts a smile on her face and greets the day. Now, we have Reality TV showing us "average everyday women" simply trying to find a man; however these women, look as if they just jumped off the pages or the cover of the *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit issue.

What does this say to women? Are we promoting emotional and physical problems in our young teenagers for the sake of fitting in and being labeled beautiful? Our quest to be perfect is capitalized on the small screen and delivered into our homes every day, coming a long way from the housewife programs of yesterday.

Children & Television

Depending on who you ask, you will receive a different take on the issue of children and television. Some parents see it as detrimental to their children while others would rather have them watching it then outside getting into trouble. Still, the television industry portrays it as a divine aspect of a child's development, and naturally they would do so after all, they have to sell television sets. But when you put together the thoughts of the Allen B. DuMont Laboratories which proclaimed in a 1945 advertisement that:

"Tomorrow's children, through the great new medium of Television, will be enrolled in a world university before they leave their cradles... .. Think what this means. How splendidly equipped they will be while young...To carry the torch of civilization forward into undreamed-of fields." (Tichi, pg. 191, 1991) However, currently the First Lady Laura Bush tells us that "Children cannot learn to read by watching television. Television is just background noise and a distraction." (Speech at the Republican National Convention in Philadelphia, July 2000). So the great debate forges ahead - whether negative or positive, it is our responsibility as a society to understand how children are influenced by television and how their actions are derived from it. Only we can conclude how much is too much, if any is good at all.

It has been said over and over again, by our grandparents, by our presidents, by our colleagues and our friends: children are the future of our societies. We must protect them, nourish them, enrich them, educate them and most of all love them. It is safe to say that our responsibility to our children is to promote proper education in a caring environment that is conducive to positive experiences; right? Then how can we possibly

live with the fact that before a child graduates from elementary school, it is quite possible that he or she will have witnessed approximately 8,000 murders through watching television. Eight thousand murders!

Unfortunately, the television is used as a sort of babysitter at times, as it is used as an element of entertainment and a companion when no one else is around. It can be used as an educational tool and to travel to far off lands. However, when a child is perched in front of a television set for an average of twenty-five to thirty-five hours a week it is difficult to find time for other activities such as reading, writing or playing with the family dog (Linder, 1998). The repercussions are astounding.

Children in America have had decreased scores on proficiency exams and testing and children of this generation have no creativity on how to entertain themselves. The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) has shown a decline in student achievements in reading and writing. According to the 1998 Writing Report Card, 16% of 4th and 8th graders and 22% of 12th graders have not mastered the basic writing skills appropriate for their grade level (Kaufman, 2000). For reading the numbers were the same; no more than 40% achieved the proficient level of reading for 4th, 8th and 12th graders (Kaufman, 2000). These numbers have increased slightly in the past three years, but only by 1% or so, no more. Another study done in November of 1999 revealed that children between the ages of 2 and 18 years are exposed to an average of six and a half hours of daily media exposure. During this six and half hours of media exposure only fifty minutes of that time is spent reading for 8-13 year olds, thirteen minutes of that time is spent reading for 14-18 year olds and ten minutes of that time is spent reading for 5-7

year olds (Kaufman, 2000). The chart in Figure 2.2 shows how the exposure is broken down:

Figure 2.2 – Daily Media Exposure in Children

Medium	Age in Years				
	2-4	5-7	8-10	11-13	14-18
Television	1:59	2:00	3:37	3:37	2:43
Taped TV Programs	0:04	0:03	0:23	0:17	0:10
Videos (Commercial)	0:32	0:21	0:27	0:31	0:29
Movies	0:01	0:02	0:30	0:22	0:11

Source: The Kaiser Family Foundation, taken from www.turnoffyourtv.com. Article written by Ron Kaufman, 2000

In addition to these statistics, The Kaiser Foundation also reported a study measuring the “contentedness index”. This index studies how children rate certain questions such as “I get along with my parents”, “I often feel sad and unhappy” and “I get into trouble a lot.” The study found that children who were scored on the “less contented” area of the index were the children with more media exposure than the other children studied. (Kaufman, 2000).

The study shows in the figure above television being the dominate form of media information on a daily basis and exposure to print media is extremely low if not almost

non-existent. The results are the numbers mentioned before with students not achieving at the level they need to be. Increased amounts of reading and writing in the home would aid in the increase of these numbers. However, children are exposed to more and more electronic media devices than anyone could have ever predicted. Their exposure is also without the supervision of an adult figure.

It is the simple nature of a child's curiosity that will draw him or her away from their studies and toward a video game, the internet or the television. The challenge now for parents is that we live in a society that is more inundated with electronic devices than ever before, and it is only bound to get worse. The problem with these devices in the home and readily available for children is that they are not exercising the mind or the body to their fullest potential. Children are much more introverted than they have been in the past and they are also battling weight problems earlier on.

The impact of television on children can be broken down into many aspects of television programming. Advertising for example is a crucial one because it influences a child's decision on snack choices or introduces young girls to makeup before the appropriate time. The overall impact of television is best described with the following quote:

"By the time most American children enter kindergarten, they have already spent more hours learning about their environment via TV than they will spend in college classrooms getting a degree."
(Whetmore, 1979)

Given the amount of hours the author has spent in the classroom since the beginning of her collegiate career, this statement is profound. Think about that for a minute. Most American children enter kindergarten at the age of five. If we think about the cognitive development of the average child, it may be safe to say that they begin showing an interest in television almost as soon as they can hold themselves up. However, in order to learn about their environments they need to comprehend and decipher the meaning of the elements that are being transmitted via the television set and the programs on it. In this regard, we can say for arguments sake, that the average child begins to actually watch – and here we mean to watch and comprehend – television at the age of two and half or three. In just two years this child will learn more about his or her environment than they will in the average time for obtaining an undergraduate college degree which is four years in this country for most students and degree programs.

The stage at which a child is watching television in the formative years of their lives is the stage at which they are most impressionable. Programs play on this fact of psychological development and create programs that are eye-catching and entertaining in order to keep the attention of the youngster. Do we see this type of engagement in our public and private institutions of higher education? The author can attest to the resounding answer of “NO” for this question. Although some professors and classes are different then others, the overall picture is that the classroom does not engage children as much as the television does; the misplacement of energies here is quite frightening for the development of our children and the future of our education systems in America.

By looking at television and dissecting its every component, we can come to certain conclusions about the messages it is sending to children. First, the advertisements

are a constant feeding of information for a child. Advertisers pay a lot of money for certain advertising spots on commercial television, mostly geared to catch your attention in the middle of a program. The programs we watch are used to lure us into the advertisement. Not the other way around! Television would not exist if it were not for advertisers. These advertisers pay for the programs that we watch and enjoy. In return, advertisers have the best medium to expose their products or business to millions of eyes every day.

Targeting children in advertisements seems like an insane idea; but consider the consequences when advertisers cater to the child demographic: children under the age of 14 in the U.S. spend over \$20 billion a year of their own money and are the primary influence on their parents to spend more than \$200 billion a year (Leonhardt & Kerwin, 1997). For this reason, children's programs usually always aired more advertisements than adult prime-time programming (Steuer & Hustedt, pg. 87, 2002). The result is an influence on what a child eats, where they want to shop and even what kind of make-up they want to buy and wear. Children as the most vulnerable of all consumers, advertisers know this and target them. The information we allow to be fed to them must be monitored appropriately.

This influence is coming from the advertisements alone; how does TV impact a child's development on the whole? In 1995, Faye B. Steuer and Jason T. Hustedt set out to find families that did not have television sets. Their thoughts at first were that they would never find one. They found four. In these case studies, one per family, the researchers wanted to know how not having a television impacted their lives and what these families thought of raising their children without television. All four families had a

similar answer. The absence of the television set in their homes provided the family more time to interact with one another, allowed for other activities that exercised their minds and bodies and promoted the creativity and effort needed for their children to find things to do in order to entertain themselves.

The result of the self-sufficient child is an abundance of “inner resources”, which is the term used by Adam Lake, the patriarch of one family studied. These qualities can be defined as the following:

- | | |
|------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| • motivation or drive | • self-confidence |
| • autonomy or self-direction | • courage |
| • a moral compass | • spirituality |
| • knowledge about the world | • wisdom |
| • self-knowledge | • the ability to see connections |

Source: “Defining ‘Inner Resources’” from TV or Not TV? A Primer on the Psychology of Television page 92-93

These attributes are elements that the non-TV families have on the top of their list of characteristics they wanted to instill in their children. Their argument is that their children have a much easier time than children that have grown up with television finding things to keep them occupied. When they find these activities to entertain themselves they are usually doing something such as reading, writing or some sort of outdoor activity that requires physical exertion.

The problem with television and the viewers of it being children is the amount of violence and sex that is portrayed on television programs. As mentioned before, children are vulnerable actors in the television viewing audience. From the beginning they are influenced greatly by their environment, their sphere of influence. By viewing television programs that have sexual or violent content, a child is being adversely molded into a more aggressive mind set. As the non-TV families pointed out that one of their main attributes they try to instill in their children is that of moral awareness, comprehension and application. Even by the early teen years, children may not have a definite sense of where they stand on their moral ground (Steuer & Hustedt, pg. 95, 2002). Therefore, violent television programs become a detrimental influence on the developing child and their idea of right and wrong become a bit more confusing to understand. The same holds true for sexual encounters. Parents may find themselves trying to instill good moral values in their children in order to make appropriate decisions about sex and love but may be contradicted by sexual images on television programs which portray a much more aggressive and love-less sexual experience.

The Reflection and Resonance

Television programs are created for the most part in the interest of the public as a whole and on an average. Most consistent programming becomes staples of each network according to us; what we are watching and what we are looking to watch. Television mirrors our moods, the state of our society, the state of the world and the everyday conflicts and accomplishments that we experience with the people close to us. Program creators' ability to provide us with the exact emotional struggle with the appropriate

solution at the time that we need it most is quite amazing. How many times have we watched an episode of “Ally McBeal” and sit there with tears in our eyes and say “that is exactly what he did to me!” We then watched intently as we study how Ally would deal with it and how she recruits her friends into the situation for a little bit of old-fashioned support.

Figure 2.3 – Television and the Mood of Society

Date	TV	America
1950s	NBC <i>Today Show</i>	Post World War II
1960s	<i>Beverly Hillbillies</i> <i>Dennis The Menace</i>	Vietnam
1970s	<i>Happy Days</i>	"<i>Make Love Not War</i>"
1980s	<i>Family Ties</i>	"Reganomics"
1990s	MTV & <i>The Real World</i>	Generation X
2000& Beyond	Reality TV	9 - 11 - 01

The Culture and Cognizance

A culture can be defined as any significant group of people with a common focus, interest or set of objectives. A culture can be categorized as follows: interest-based, belief-centered, regionally-founded, experience-related, objective-driven, and behavior-common. When analyzed closely, television can be inserted into any one of these categories. The concept as a whole can be defined as an interest-based culture. It is a concept that brings people together because of their common interest in the programming and the stories that are revealed through them. All of the other types of cultures could be appointed to certain genres of television and its viewers that it captivates. Each category is driven by the influences of our environment and manipulates their behaviors according to those influences.

Aside from the television culture, there are subcategories within that are useful when studying the effects of television on our society. One culture is the purpose of this thesis, Reality TV. This genre of television shows provides us with many cultures within its parameters. There are the fans that watch, an interest-based culture; the participants that make up the cast of the shows, an experience-based culture; and the producers, directors and creators of the shows, an objective-driven culture as well as many sub-cultures within these cultures. The study of each culture within these categories is an interesting aspect as to why we watch, what we get from it, and what it means to us in the end. It is important to understand the many different cultures that we are viewing and also the ones that surround us on a daily basis to understand how we process information and how we apply what we see, learn and acquire from watching television.

Mostly driven by the media as a whole, television has provided our culture with many images and personas that we use to define decades, significant occurrences and generations. As the most accessible communicative tool it is no wonder that television has helped to create the superstar personas of some of yesterday's and today's most famous celebrities. When the author was a child, *Tom & Jerry* was the be all and end all of childhood. If we were watching television, we were watching *Tom & Jerry*. Now, *Sponge Bob Square Pants* is all the rage, you can even buy a Halloween costume in it. Of course, back then, *Tom & Jerry* was not seen as a violent cartoon. Now it is, so now we have a square sponge that dances around and drops his pants for people.

Icons of yesterday most likely will never be able to be re-circulated. Marilyn Monroe was one celebrity everyone wanted to be. Men wanted to marry her, women wanted to be her. She signified mysterious sexuality and good-old fashioned femininity while she charmed men with her bashful, blond-bombshell type flakiness, she wowed us with her beauty and strength. Now, we have Britany Spears; with her chunky legs and cowboys boots revealed under a way-to-short miniskirt that looks like it was mauled by a cat. She swears she is a virgin even though she has lived with her boyfriend for two years, and she denies having breast implants even though her bust line went from barely an A cup to a C cup in the first month of her rise to the top of the pop charts. She is an icon of American pop culture; driven by the media as a fresh-faced, sweetheart with vocal chords that anyone would die for. But where exactly is her real talent?

The author freely admits to being a huge fan of Marilyn and an absolute despiser of Britany; for good reason. Marilyn provided our society with elegance and grace. Meanwhile she was a sex-symbol with a subtlety that no one has yet replicated. Britany

simply puts it all out there. Where is the mystery? Where is the good common sense? The problem with Britney Spears types is what we have already discussed in this chapter and what we will discuss further in Chapter Three. She is an image of everything that is detrimental to the development of young women. But her image sells everything, so we are stuck with it all over our television screens.

Another shift has happened since the death of the most photographed woman in the world. Princess Diana was a woman everyone could relate to. Then again, she was a woman that no one was supposed to relate to. A royal with real problems, she showed the world that wealth is not everything; a common misconception here in America. Her image was everywhere when she was alive and is still quite prevalent now that she is gone. In the wake of her death, we don't see much "royal watching" anymore; instead we have certain celebrities that we simply can't get enough of. We follow people that don't seem real even in their downtime. They don't have problems with their weight; they have perfect boyfriends or husbands and they always look great. Their images don't ever seem real yet we are drawn to them night after night on any and every television show they are on. They are the icons of today, perfection and all. The media pushes and hypes up their image and the television brings them to us on a daily basis; right to our fingertips and our gazing stares.

Television is a messenger of images designed to give the viewer some sort of insight on the physical and functional aspects and quality of a given product and/or location. It exposes us to many different aspects of the world including physical characteristics of certain countries, people inhabiting those countries and cultures that are a part of a certain region or country. Television programs produced or filmed in foreign

countries for the consumption of the American viewing public or American television programs that are aired to foreign audiences provide viewers with insight into foreign lands. These images that are portrayed to these viewers may be the only chance they have to see that given country. It is the responsibility of the producers and creators of these programs to provide an accurate and precise view of the culture they are portraying. But to say or believe that television is an accurate portrayal of a given culture would be presumptuous. Aspects of a given culture can most certainly be conveyed through script writing and set dressing but we can not assume that it is all real; a concept that begins to be confused with the onslaught of Reality TV which we will discuss in Chapter Three.

It is no surprise and certainly safe to conclude that television weighs in on some sort of influence over our society and the individual viewer. As it has already been discussed, children are the prime example of the affects and influence television has on our culture. Here in America, television is a major source of entertainment and information. In other countries, this is becoming more and more of the case as television programs begin to cross more borders than ever before. Because of the growing number of programs aired and viewers watching television it is an expectation of most who study the effects of television that the audiences' perception of the realities filmed on the television screen will closely relate to the realities that we deal with in everyday life. (Tan, Tan & Gibson, 2003). In most cases this is certainly true. But how much of an influence these activities have on a person's course of action and perception of their own reality can fluctuate greatly.

Theoretically, we can try to explain the influence that television has on the American culture and there are many published theories that do just this. First, the

cultivation theory created by Gerbner, Gross, Morgan and Signorielli in 1982 can be described as a concept that “suggests television presents a distorted but uniform picture of reality that is internalized and accepted by heavy viewers” (Tan, Tan & Gibson, 2003). Gerbner describes television as an avenue of conformability and “mainstreaming”. It has the ability of bringing people together into a common interest and belief system and therefore influencing their values and norms.

This theory is based on the amount of television a viewer is consuming in a given day. It can be surmised that many of our fears and doubts are created by the television that we watch. September 11, 2003 and the after-math of this tragedy certainly did not put people’s minds at ease when it came to international travel. We were constantly fed information that made us fear anything and everything that had to do with leaving the safety of our homes and the comforts of our families. Yet, day in and day out we were all glued to our television sets to see what the day’s news would bring. Eventually, we had to get to the point where we simply could not watch anymore. The fear that was instilled in all of us came from the images that we witnessed on the small screen in our living rooms. The following year, on the anniversary on the day, the images repeated themselves in a numbing nostalgia that no one wanted to see again. The images, the first time, were already etched in the stonework of our memory for the rest of our lives. Still, we watched.

The second theory is that of social cognitive reactions. This theory describes the influence of the television on a viewer’s behavior by learning through observation (Bandura, 1986). This theory explains that behavior is learned when it is seen, accepted by the viewer and then repeated when inserted into the viewer’s life. This aspect of

television influence is a strong argument for the positive and negative aspects of television; depending on which side you sit. Television is designed to fit all the criteria of the learning through observation; sometimes this maybe positive while others it is not.

Two extremes provide an explanation. For one, look at the way the female role has changed over time. At first, women were solely housewives; responsible for the children, the cleaning, the house and the cooking. These women were seen as dainty and feminine always wearing nice dresses and matching pumps. Their hair and make-up were always tidy, especially right before their husbands came home. Is this an accurate portrayal of women in America? Well, maybe in 1959 but now we have a shift in the roles of the household and now we see women on television that are kicking butt instead of cooking chicken. Women now are in pant suites and loafers, they hardly wear make-up and their hair sometimes gets a bit ruffled. Shows such as *Alias* and *Karen Sisco* have provided women with a strong social persona. These observations are quite admirable for mimicking. On the other side of that, we have children watching television and viewing shows such as *Cops* and *ER*. Even children's shows, programs written and produced strictly for the young population, are aggressive and violent. Here we have a situation where the values of our children are influence greatly but in negative way.

Thirdly, the cognitive functional theory was developed in 1997 by Alexis Tan, Gerdean Tan, Nelson and Dong. This theory combines the perceived realism from the cultivation theory and the cognitive and reinforcement principles of the social cognitive theory in order to analyze how specific values and behaviors are learned and internalize (Tan, Tan & Gibson, 2003).

The basis of this theory is that the influence of television realities on the individual is due in part to how readily available they make themselves in order to accept these realities and adopt them as their own or an extension of their own. In addition, the individual will be more ready to accept certain norms, values and behaviors when the forms presented to them are easily identifiable and have a specific function that weighs more towards the positive. As individuals we are certainly more driven by goals and dreams than anything else. When the result of our actions is a rewarding experience or when the more we try things we are more and more successful each time (the old adage “if at first you don’t succeed, try, try again” applies here), we are more likely to perform these actions again and again. Here television can be seen as a validation tool for our daily lives and the lifestyles in which we function.

These theories can be used to describe the influence that television has on foreign audiences. For the most part, American television is more widely available in foreign countries than foreign programs are available here. These programs give audiences a closer look at American culture and also provide them with the elements they need to form an opinion or belief about Americans and our society. Because American television is more readily available in foreign countries, it is the prime source for their information about our country. Now we are beginning to see a shift in programming. American television is beginning to “borrow” from international shows and the American produced shows are beginning to lose their “appeal in foreign markets”. The reason for this shift is that there was fear the international world would be shaped to greatly by American television programs and therefore leads to the Americanization of the world. Basically, people of other cultures and in other countries are more interested in watching themselves

than they are watching foreigners (Kapner, The New York Times, January 6, 2003). The same holds true in America which we will see more of in Chapter Three when we discuss *The Next Joe Millionaire*.

As we have here on American television, the programs that are aired in other countries provide viewers with a simple association of realities and occurrences. Since their simplistic nature, viewers are more motivated to accept what information they received by way of the television set. This motivation leads to the learning and acceptance of the American culture and the probable application of our behaviors in their culture. The impact and influence can become a crucial aspect and successful attribute of the messenger that television creates as a string that ties the world together. Some research has shown that this acceptance has even changed the way in which certain cultures function. A study done in the Philippines in 1997 showed a considerable amount of deterioration in their own values and norms as a result of frequent viewing of American television programs.

So what does this all say? Television is a portrait we have painted of our culture, our behaviors and our lives. Foreign audiences define their views and opinions of our country by what they watch on television because it is so readily available. The more frequently these programs are watched the more accepting the audience is towards our culture. However, the stereotypes that our culture has been labeled with are also validated in the frequency of viewing our television programs. A study done in Russia in 1992 revealed certain themes that are consistent in our television programs and therefore reflect aspects about our personality as an entire society. The themes most frequently perceived were: individualism, independence, competition, hard work and freedom. The

themes least frequently perceived were: tolerance of other races, obedience, and equality (Tan, Tan, Gibson, pg. 35, 2003). The programs that provided the most acceptance of the American culture were news programs and television dramas.

In our own country, we see the affects that television has on our society as a whole. We can study the affects that it has on children and on women (both addressed in this chapter) as well as every cultural group that resides in the United States. Whether these affects are sociological, psychological, or cognitive it is difficult to thoroughly study them without taking into account other variables that could create an alternative result. In this regard, we must take into account every other aspect of a given individual's life. We are surrounded by elements of influence wherever we go and in whatever we do. Our friends, family, co-workers all play a part in influencing our values and behaviors and provide assistance to the television medium in creating how we view the world we live in.

Television in our country is seen as many different things. Many people view it as a companion, a comforting voice in an empty and dark house before everyone else arrives home from work or simply a friend that aids in the wasting of valuable time; an informational messenger greeting us with the pertinent information we need to start our day whether it's the weather or traffic or simply reporting the news. It is a vehicle for entertainment purposes, providing us with stories that make us cry, jokes that make us laugh and drama that makes us a little bit uneasy. This medium has become a natural way for all of us to spend our downtime. When we have nothing else to do, we turn on the television, when we are cleaning the house we turn on the television. Television is a

constant living thing taking up physical and metaphysical space. Simply put, it is the easiest way to do something.

Depending on your age, where you came from, and how you were raised, television will have a very different meaning for you. The hardest aspect of studying the effects of television on the individual is the very nature of an actual individual. Everyone is different and how we process, retrieve and translate images and words that are provided for us changed with each person. It is very difficult to describe how and why someone cried over the breakup of Luke and Laura when one would have no idea how their individual thought processes functions. No two experiences are ever alike even for the same person (Jankowski & Fuchs, pg. 144, 1995). It is quite possible however that television has such a profound effect on the individual that it not only can be classified as an overload of information but it can even change behavioral patterns in certain individuals.

The research regarding behaviors in Filipino viewers being changed from frequent viewing of American television programs explains the impact. The viewer is a sort of blank canvas where the television is the painter already envisioning his final created masterpiece. However, we can not concretely put television at blame for all of the problems in our society. It may be the problem to certain situations, but even there we need to look at other aspects of the scenario. For example, the decline in scores for children in national testing suggests that children are watching more television and playing more video games than they are reading, writing and doing their homework. In this scenario we simply cannot blame television and walk away. We need to look at what the parents are doing, are they telling their children "no TV until your homework is

done”, are they enforcing it? Also, we need to look at the possibilities of learning disabilities or negative encounters at school which could be detrimental to the child’s ability and desire to concentrate on anything that requires some sort of effort. All of these are variables that need to be taken into account when studying the effects of television.

Television Today and Tomorrow

Television has come a long way, but has further to travel. Now with the influx of computers and technology getting better by the minute; the television set is about to become an outdated concept with more flaws than attributes. Anymore, life is spent in the home in front of the television set but things may change sooner rather than later.

The coming of age of the “Super TV” is here and only getting better. Now we can record a show while we use the facilities and we won’t miss a beat. The inventions of HDTV and TIVO have provided Americans with super quality, super convenience television right at their fingertips. Who wouldn’t want to sit at home all night long? In addition, we don’t even have to get up to go shopping anymore. With “iTV”, or interactive television, all we have to do is order it with our remote control during the commercial. Then we will even get advertisements for products that are related to the ones we just purchased. Interactive TV began through Microsoft in 2000 and is said to generate as much as \$7 billion in revenue through e-commerce by this year. It is estimated that 30 million people will have the capability to access interactive television by this year as well. While we are shopping via the tele-waves everything we do is being tracked and recorded. Our televisions will be customized to fit our lifestyle profile and shopping habits (Kaufman, 2000). If that weren’t enough, characters from our children’s

favorite shows can talk to them during commercial breaks using their names and selling a product to them. Just another way for the television to control our children's attention away from what they really should be doing which is reading.

With all of this latest technology one has to wonder how much of an intrusion into our lives are we going to let television be. Although it has its positive aspects, the television speaking to our children should be where we draw the line. But television isn't dead yet; however, how long will it be before telecommunications is the new trend? The shift in television programming and the acceleration of the internet is beginning to pave a pathway for the next generation of televised programs and services. As our programs move away from the scripted shows that attempt to mimic life in our society and become real people depicting real emotions and real situations; the line between our own reality and televisions perceived fiction because quite blurred. All of a sudden, we escape from our own reality by entertaining ourselves with someone else's.

Conclusion

So what was the reason for people to watch TV? How did it evolve from nearly succumbing to an early burial to become a staple of American life? "It well may be that TV's most basic attraction is television itself: the 'window' that expands our sight to other places, and the 'magic' that brings performers, programs, and events into our daily lives." (Von Schilling, pg 209, 2003). Television is a vacation from our own reality without leaving the house. It provides us with entertaining programs that do not require much thought in order to understand. It is an element that has reached every person not

only in this country but in this world and in an indirect way has brought us closer together.

The impact of the television medium on our society is one that could not truly be predicted at its inception; but its progress into the future, using history as our guide, is somewhat easier to see. Our country and our society have taken on a different feeling, a different mood and our plans for the future have changed. So have our television programs. As fiction and reality have slowly begun to interlace themselves, the defining line between the two genres has slowly been broken down. Reality begins to become stranger than fiction and our own reality is consumed with that of others. Now, on the horizon is a new form of television entertainment which doesn't necessarily take us to another place but shows us a different reality than our own. In some way we use the information these "real" characters provide for us in our own lives to sort through the hard-to-cope-with reality we encounter on a daily basis. Television has defined every decade since its invention. In the new millennium, we now define our culture with a new genre of programming known as Reality TV.

CHAPTER THREE

REALITY TV:

**Culture & Community
Through the Eyes of the Camera**

“Reality TV is part cause and part symptom of cultural conditions distinguished of meanings through image generation vectoral displacement and recirculation.”
Tabloid Culture, Kevin Glynn

Ah, Reality TV. As American as apple pie yet the sheer thought of its mention sends shivers down some spines. To others, it is a refuge from all of the tiny idiosyncrasies that annoy and destroy us on a daily basis. Still for others, it is the very basic of comedy programs that provide us with our most loathed characteristics of ourselves and the others around us; the women whining, backstabbing and conniving; the men falling for the pretty blond with the perfect teeth and perfect skin who just so happens to have nothing in the form of a functional brain; the break up two weeks after the end of the show's twilight. Reality TV shows have taken our nation, and the world for that matter, by storm. There's the drama, the heartbreak, the comedy, the mansions. But where is the reality? Ok, ok, so to prevent the argument that is about to brew, let's see what exactly it is about these shows that have made them into the mere definition of television programming in the 21st century.

America has always been based on the dream of wealth and luxury. Some people have it, others don't. In our quest for these material things, we also long to be perfect and beautiful. The thoughts of a perfect life have gone through all of our heads at one time or another; the gorgeous bride, the handsome groom, the beautiful family, the huge white mansion on the hilltop, the jaguar and the trendy SUV in the driveway, two and half kids, a dog and a cat. It's the perfect picture of domestic life; and now we have this commercial break.

TV has echoed every aspect of the American dream. It is a mirror to every American's lifestyle whether directly or indirectly. Reality TV is yet another invention of our own desires and interests; mirroring our very thoughts and anguishes. Now, instead of painting a pretty picture to increase our jealousies and aspects of inadequacies, Reality TV provides us with the problems and conflicts we have all encountered at one time or another and is not sugar-coated behind a well-thought-out script written by a team of writers. Or does it? How much is actually scripted? How much of it is yet another desperate wanna-be actress or actor playing up to the camera to show their best side to casting agents? Although we have defined Reality TV here as any "unscripted" program involving "real" characters, how much of these shows are actually scripted for ratings sake?

The phenomenon that we have called Reality TV has raised many questions in such a short amount of time; and yet people can't explain its popularity and the importance that it has on our culture and the future of television as we know it today. Reality TV is here to stay; for the time being anyway and maybe – just for fun – we'll keep it around. If not for anything, then to make ourselves feel better that we would never "act like that" in front of millions of people. Or at least we hope not.

Introduction

Reality TV programs have emerged from every corner of the televised enterprise. But the genre is not entirely new. Back in the 1950s, the era of the "Quiz Show Rule", one show captivated audiences for its "real-life" atmosphere. *Queen for a Day* debuted in January of 1955 on NBC after a successful run as a radio program since its inception. The

popularity of the show was created to the ordinary housewives and their “sob stories” that had them crowned “Queen” by the audience’s applause or lack thereof.

A successful hit, NBC lengthened its run from a thirty minute program to forty-five minutes in order to increase money raised by advertisements. The advertisement spot during the show were sold at \$4,000 per minute. Audiences were enthralled with the concept and the activities that were portrayed on the small screen. Women and girls, and probably the men as well, felt better about themselves when they heard how horrible the potential “Queens” had it. They watched to see how they would be changed, how they would react to the change and being picked and to see how much worse of a position they could be in themselves. The audience cried along with the four women as they told their stories; and hence a genre of television was formed. Along with the new form of programming came the culture that would be created as a result of it; people laughing at others misery, crying along with a sad story, and applauding a much needed make-over. And so became the reasons why we watch.

The shows since, have provided viewers with an array of possibilities both stateside and abroad. Reality TV came to America from the likes of Sweden, Japan, Australia and England. *Survivor* is not new in America; it was actually created in Sweden, Big Brother got its start in The Netherlands and The Mole is an import of Belgium. Now, in addition to America, Australia has its own sort of onslaught of these programs with really no end in sight. Programs such as *The Block* and *Dream House* are vying for position on the major networks throughout Australia and New Zealand. Categories of reality-based programs are now needed to distinguish between them all. Make-over shows, Competitive shows, Romance-based, Relationship-based; we could go

on and on. Before we know it, there will be a show representing each profession around the globe which may be starting already with the idea to create *Making the Cut* a new reality-based program encapsulating the art of the hairdresser.

MTV pioneered the Reality TV genre in America when *The Real World* hit the airwaves and swiftly became one of the most popular shows on the Generation-X type cable network. *The Real World* has documented how strangers interact with one another when placed in a tightly controlled situation. The attraction to the show highlights the very basic concepts of human behavior. As humans, we find entertainment in the actions of others, especially when they are provided for us in a passive way. Characters on Reality TV shows are filmed “acting normally”. This “normal” behavior is different from our everyday behavior, so we feel compelled to watch. When there are fights, lover’s quarrels, etc; we tune in to see the outcome mostly out of disbelief that adults would act like this on national television but for the most part because it provides us with the drama that we either lack in our everyday lives or have an abundance of and need to find relief from it.

These behaviors, formed over the course of our lifetime, are the result of years of influence of our society as a whole, our environment on us as individuals and our overall interactions with others. The influence we have on young children carries an important weight when discuss Reality TV programs and television in general. A three-year yearning to watch *The Bachelor* does so to be next to her mother. The show serves as a reminder of the time she shares with her mother and the bond that has been created. The actions become ritualistic behavior and therefore give the child a sense of security,

knowing that if that show is on, she knows she will be sitting right next to her mother at that time.

Figure 3.1: Reality TV Genres

Make-Over-Based	"Trading Spaces" "Extreme Makeover"
Competition-Based	"Survivor" "The Amazing Race"
Romance-Based	"The Bachelor" "For Love or Money"
Relationship-Based	"The Real World" "Newlyweds"

The fact of the matter is that Reality TV shows are extremely cheap to make. Their only expenses are the limos, the mansions and the editors. Yes, that's right the editors. Reality TV, remember is taped, not live. So the question of how much is real lingers on the tongues of fans and non-fans alike. In other words the producers tell us what they want us to see. What we don't know is what gets left on the cutting room floor. As a result of the minimum amount of expenses paid to produce these shows, the networks are raking in the cash with consistent exorbitant numbers in the ratings and commercial advertisement income.

Case in point: Fox's *Joe Millionaire* wowed audiences all over the nation when Even Marriot arrived on the screen with his model-esque physique. The program on average drew nearly 23 million viewers to their television sets every Monday night. The finale, when Even chose Zora, the brown-haired beauty from Lambertville, New Jersey, brought one out of five people to their living rooms. Nine months later, television's most surprising successes became its most spectacular failure when *The Next Joe Millionaire* aired. Bringing only 6.5 million viewers to their television sets during the Monday night time slot, and drawing only 5.4 million to view its finale when David chose Linda and was required to tell her the truth of his financial situation. (Associated Press, 2003)

Television executives admit to trying to "sneak it past the American people" and pushing for a second round of a concept that they knew would only be successful the first time around. But why wasn't it successful? *The Bachelor* has seen four successful seasons of air time. Then again, the Bachelor is a basic dating game with a "process that works" as explained by the host of the show Chris Harrison. *Joe Millionaire* is a game of deceit and betrayal, once we seen the outcome, it's been done. Everyone now knows the outcome, whether or not the woman will accept the lie and choose to be with her new-found love is another story. Apparently, 5.4 million people worldwide wanted to see whether she would or not. When Evan came clean, 40 million people in the USA alone wanted to know. The numbers alone prove that it is harder the second time around to sell an old concept especially when the premise of the show rests on the reaction to the outcome. Basically, Americans don't want to watch Europeans, especially when we need subtitles to understand them.

Impact

Reality TV has already in its young existence caused quite uproar among viewers and non-viewers alike. The romance-based programs require interesting dissection. We can see the potential impact they have on young women and the slightly negative light they portray women in. They also provide a questionable portrayal of the institution of marriage and monogamy. Their message is quite clear in modern America, you need a monetary reward to stay in a marital bond with someone you are supposed to love.

For Love of Money & For Love or Money 2 were one of the most successful Romance-Based, Reality TV shows in their short history. Airing over the course of the summer, *For Love or Money* repeatedly won its timeslot week after week. It all began with Rob Cantos looking for love in a sea of twenty-five young women. Moreover, his Texan charms, was fleeting with the ladies. The concept of the show was this: twenty-five women all vying for the man's affection, if he chooses you, you get to choose him or one million dollars. If you chose the money you would never be able to see Rob again. Rob, unaware of this ploy, assumed he was there to find his soul mate. And so the games begin. In the end, he chose bright-eyed Erin Brodie; yet another beauty with a streak of fame in her background, Erin is the daughter of former San Francisco 49ers Quarterback John Brodie. Erin, however, chose the money. One million dollars richer and not a regret in the world for breaking the heart of a good old fashioned Texan, Erin was offered an additional million if she gave the million back and accepted the offer to star in the next installment of the show: *For Love or Money 2*. Already a ratings grabber, *For Love or Money* steadily stayed in the top of the ratings scale all throughout the summer as Erin

narrowed down her choices. Interesting plot twists, guest arrivals, life-changing decision; the program had all the right ingredients of a nail biting adventure film. When Rob was invited back, Erin dismissed him in the next few rounds of eliminations. Do we wonder why? Do you really think that a man who was rejected on national television for money would pick the girl? Yeah, we didn't think so either and so Rob was history yet again.

During the course of the show, the guys were asked at one point if they wanted to get out; they could walk away with a small sum of cash in their pocket. When Zach left the show because he "didn't really see himself with Erin", her only question was "how much did you accept to leave?" The measly \$10,000 consolation prize was all Erin wanted to know about. In the end, she chose sexy Chad, who in return chose her. What is the monetary gain from all this? She keeps the original check for one million dollars and splits the other million with Chad. Not a bad payday especially when you get to keep the guy. But what does this all say about how we attempt to meet and keep our future soul mates? When it comes to love, millions of dollars should not be thrown around like empty bottles of Evian.

Some shows have defined the very essence of voyeurism that we seldom find out in the open in our culture. If the shows are trashy, they draw more of a rating, but is there really any substance in them? Most advertise and promote sexual encounters, partying, drinking, etc. with the common knowledge of if you want your fifteen minutes of fame all you need is a little infidelity. *Love Cruise: The Maiden Voyage* was another disaster to grace the small screen as a reality-based program. In September and October of 2001, sixteen singles were selected to cruise to the Caribbean Sea stopping along the way for an all out good time which involved drinking, dancing and whatever else would

occur. During the cruise, the participants were paired up and encouraged to have an intimate relationship with one another. Most physical activities only took about one to two days to begin. At the end of each episode, or day for the participants, the men vote one woman off the boat and the women vote one man off. The last couple standing receives \$200,000 and a trip around the world.

Barely able to produce proper ratings, the show proved to only be a great show “if you’re a whore” according to the show’s producer Kathy Wetherall. It provided its participants with their fifteen minutes of fame; of course do you know what the ultimate female winner, Melissa, looks like? Neither does anyone else. The title suggests another departure from port, but knowing the way television executives look at numbers, this ship has been docked for good.

The Attack of 9-11 vs. Joe Millionaire

The state of the world today seems to become grimmer with every flip of the channel and every turn of the page. It is no wonder, really, that the world has turned to Reality TV for a little dose of good old fashioned distraction. September 11, 2001 was a day most of this generation will never forget. Two generations before us were brought back to their day of infamy without prior notice. It started as any normal day would; rising out of bed to a glorious sunny day with a blue sky so blue it looked painted on. Everyone headed in to work, some of us took our time to enjoy one of the last clear fall days we would know in the world that we no longer know. What began as a normal day, suddenly become a reality that no one would care to remember. Right in front of our

eyes, through the window that has kept us company for so many decades; we saw a plane dive into one of our most famed architectural landmarks.

The television set became in that instant, not just a box transmitting entertainment and information, but a life line to our own reality. We couldn't take our eyes away, pondering the possibilities of what could have happened for such a drastic tragedy. Our eyes peeled, glued to the television, not really hearing what the newscaster was saying. Maybe the pilot had a heart attack, maybe there was a malfunction on the plane and the pilot lost control. A million and one thoughts crossed each other inside of our heads as we watched in silence and unsolicited focus. Then before our very eyes, it happened again. A second plane, a second building. We had to pinch ourselves to know for sure if it was real. As tears welled up in our eyes and rolled down our cheeks, we watched in disbelief. As we read the scrolling words across the bottom of the screen we learned of a third and a fourth plane, one hit the Pentagon; the other, a field in Pennsylvania. What was happening? Why was it happening? Right before our very eyes we watched a horrible moment in history unfold on our small screens; in all its Technicolor greatness.

In the wake of 9/11, the television set became more than just a companion, more than just a voice in a silent house; it became a lifeline to the world. We watched with our families close to our sides and wept while asking how could someone do this to us? We rallied around our President, hanging on his every word, running home to see his speeches broadcast live from the Senate Chambers. We rallied around our country, renewing our faith and love for a nation that stands tall. All the while watching, through the box in our living rooms, becoming a part of a circle, even though we couldn't see the

other people, we all held hands around the television set awaiting the next step in what inevitably became a war.

Here, we watched as our brave soldiers rose to the occasion and carried out the duty of their country, carrying themselves bravely into battle. The television became our only source for quick and effortless information. It was a time of great grief, a time of great struggle, a time of questioned faith and a time when reading a newspaper was too difficult to carry out. The television was our messenger, of good news and bad, and our outlet for the grief that we would never learn to push aside. This was reality TV.

September 11, 2001 was real-life being unfurled before our very eyes; whether anything was edited or not, it was very much real. Then we watched Operation Enduring Freedom live on the nightly news, green blasts of light, static, wind, and somewhat of a reporter's voice. As a people, we bonded together through a common experience; real life, real emotion, real grief, real disbelief. In the end, we needed something to ease the emotional tension, we needed something we could revel in together, something that made us feel like a common core of a whole person. We asked for an outlet, the television networks responded.

After September 11, 2001, we saw an onslaught of Reality TV programming coming from every direction, in every genre, on every channel and at all times of night and day. The result was an easy diversion from the reality we just witnessed. During the war, we grew weary of hearing about our soldiers dying. So we turned the channel to watch young Andrew Firestone stave off icy stabs of one potential suitor who became known as "Tina Fabulous". We followed the girls as they cooed every woman's dream man, and all we had to do is push a button. Not bad for a Wednesday night at home with

the girls. With the news of the war and the impending fears of travel, *Joe Millionaire* brought us across the Atlantic to the French countryside. Even though they were closer to the problems in Iraq and Afghanistan, the French country eased our minds and diminished our tensions. It brought us to a beautiful chateau and scenery that was far from war-torn and battered. In addition, we laughed at how goofy girls could possibly act when their eyes are filled with dollar signs and the bachelor they are after is better off keeping his mouth shut and simply posing for the camera than opening it with a “Well I think she’s hot, so I’m gonna keep her around.”

Reality TV has been defined as “unscripted” programming. When we compare *Joe Millionaire* with September 11, 2001, is there really a comparison? The definition of Reality TV has become a loosely coupled group of words that doesn’t necessarily describe the actuality of its concept. To be real to us is to be the tragedy of 9/11. This is the way we will always classify the difference between the two. The betrayal and manipulation of *Joe Millionaire* pales in comparison to the loss of life, security and moral grounding. The concept of Reality TV then is forced to be placed into the same genre of any other television program with the same purpose; to entertain completely whether through drama, comedy or talk. In reality, no pun intended, these shows are simply distractions from our own reality, as grim as it may become, in these harsh and conflicting times.

September 11, 2001 taught us a great deal about ourselves, how vulnerable we can be and how strong we can be. Reality TV has given us a different outlet. It has shown us how much we need to laugh, to cry and most of all how much we need to escape the

everyday chaos every once and awhile in order to enjoy everything that we have right in front of us.

Indoctrination

Just as Barry Manilow has his “Fanilows” and Bennifer have their strange following of fans, Reality TV has created a distinct emergence of an interesting culture. The fans that follow these shows do so as scorekeepers in the press box and they schedule the debut of a new addition to their entertainment arsenals. Fans of Reality TV are about to become even hungrier with the inception of a new cable channel, *Reality Central*, which is devoted solely to their favorite programs and is an interactive cable channel and website designed to keep Reality TV fans in connection with their favorite cast members. Fans will also be able to read and keep up on their favorite Reality stars’ actions with a new magazine to be published by Premedia. Both channels of reality – based entertainment news will be up and running in January 2004. Even though there was a decline in Reality-based shows in the Fall 2003 lineup, there is still a market for these communicative resources.

Reality TV cast members, just as celebrities, are hounded and stalked by paparazzi and star-crazed fans. Our society has been driven to always want to know the next step and the media provides it for us. When the marriage of Trista Rehn and Ryan Sutter was complete and the last installment of the four hour special was aired, magazines all over published issues with headlines that read “*Our Big Baby Plans*” underneath a beaming Trista and her hunky firefighter husband. Although she proclaims that there will no longer be cameras in her life now that the wedding is complete, Trista has become a

new kind of pop culture icon. Exposed for the entire world to see, her first kiss with the man she finally married, the wedding preparations, the confession of her lack of ever having an orgasm. Trista is no longer just another girl. She will forever be *The Bachelorette* and one half of the only Reality TV relationship that has actually worked, so far. No matter how far down the line we go, every action on her part and the part of Ryan will be published news; for as long as they both shall live.

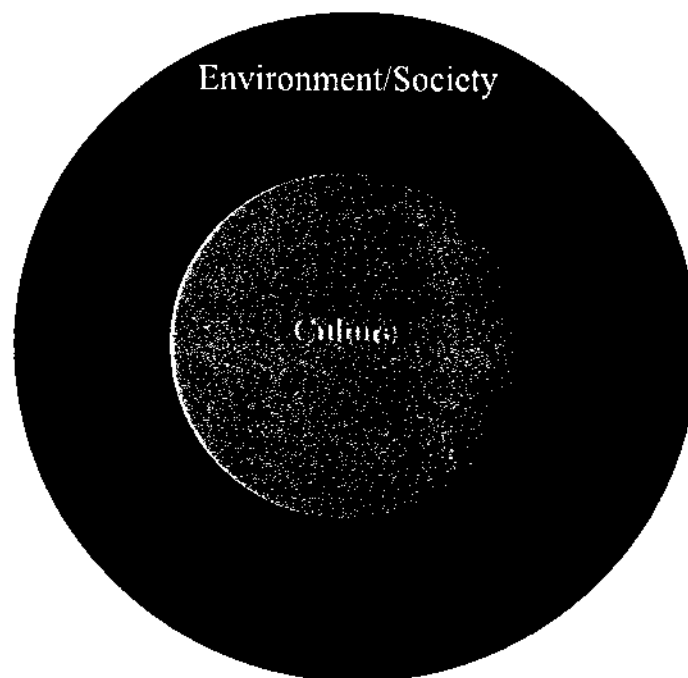


Figure 3.2: Sphere of Influence

As shown above, every culture is created for the most part by something else. Cultures are drawn together due to a common interest of a certain belief or objective.

Every culture is influenced by the environment that surrounds it. Reality TV may just have been born due to the downturn of the economy and the political conflicts we have with our enemies. The media is the food source for this culture of fans and cast members. Brought together with a common bond, their environment has led them to create this group of people; the media is the course that enables it to live on past its original orientation to the world.

Instruction

From the beginning, the television has acted as a mirror of the current society. The shows and themes that are emitted through this window can spark national controversy bringing two separate worlds together for debate. How can we forget the Dan Quayle versus Murphy Brown debacle? An example of how much television plays a part of our everyday lives; the concept of a mother having a child out of wedlock outraged the young politician. What does this say to our young women of America? The questions and concerns Quayle raised were poignant tidbits of history-making drama. *Murphy Brown* took a risk with the storyline but Quayle exhibited how easy it was to merge reality with fiction when he blamed Candice Bergen personally for the plot's creation.

With this example we have the interpretation of the American family unit. First we had Mrs. Cleaver and her tidy family, and then we saw the Bunkers bicker their way into our living rooms until we finally came upon the Bundys. The portrayal of the American family has degraded to the dysfunctional over the years. Now we have an onslaught of reality-based television programs that center around the same sort of dysfunction. Instead of watching how a television interacts with one another, we have

children choosing a new wife on *Who Wants to Marry My Dad?* and couples testing their loyalty on *Temptation Island* and *Cheaters*; where all you need is infidelity in order to get your fifteen minutes of fame. Is this really what marriage has come to? Why do we watch? Because for some strange reason we are drawn to the dysfunction whether real or fiction; it doesn't matter if the very basis for the drama is right in our home, we want to see others have the same problems as we do. Somehow, this justifies our own difficult realities. If we see others suffering in the same situation we are suffering in, it makes it ok. We suddenly have a justification for our mistakes and our suffering.

So what does it teach us. Don't let Dan Quayle know you're pregnant if you're not married? Well, maybe not exactly, but it does enforce the very basic values we were raised with. On the other hand, it also shows us what is not appropriate or appropriate. The problem here is the distinction between reality and fiction. Our children and young women and men don't quite understand that "it's only on TV" when they are 14 and experimenting with everything. Reality TV has given women a new form of degradation in that they are lumped in a group of cattle and forced to fight to the top of the pile. Now, our society is saying its ok to be dating a man that is dating five other women, and kissing every single one of them. Ten years ago, people were crying monogamy due to the AIDS crisis, now dating is all about having a good time and throwing caution to the wind. Is this really what we want cascading all over our television screens?

Reality TV has shown the world how our moral values have been compromised and ultimately destroyed in modern America. The sanctity of marriage, the demoralization of women, the ignorance of safer sex, the private elements of intimacy; all are compromised with these Romanced-based Reality TV programs. What it teaches us

and the impression it leaves on young women is that if you don't like the guy so much, you walk away with a million dollars; or if you want the guy to be your husband you have to deal with the fact that he is dating, kissing and fondling twenty-five other women. Since when is money and love weighed together? Sure we all want the handsome, smart *and* rich man, but what happened to teaching our young women that it's what's inside that counts. The same holds true for the women of these shows. Not so much "real babes", Trista Rehn doesn't look like anyone the author went to high school with; and either does Ryan for that matter.

On the other side, minus money, what ever happened to dating one person? These shows provide a skewed view on how to find a potential husband, showing that sometimes this is the only way to do it. Most cast members will admit that they chose Reality TV because they weren't too successful any other way. They audition to see what will happen, and in the meantime they may just find their soul mate. Trista did, but then she and Ryan got greedy. Again, back to the money issue we have three weeks of specials documenting every aspect of their wedding plans. The grand climax? No, it wasn't the wedding; it was Ryan being set up by two strippers at his bachelor party by the producers from ABC. Another example of how blissful happiness is not what draws viewers in, we need conflict, betrayal and deceit. Andrew Firestone knew the intentions of the networks executives. "There were two dramas going on: making a television show and making a relationship. I knew we had to create a show that kept viewers interested." (Redbook, December 2003, pg. 114) Ryan Sutter on the other hand fired away at the network stating that "Everyone out there is trying to exploit you....I felt as if I was being set up to test my commitment to Trista." (InTouch Magazine, pg. 16, December 15, 2003). The two

statements pertaining to the situations they were in at the time provides insight on the type of people they may be in person. The different angles of emotional responses can be gleaned as to why Andrew is suddenly single and Ryan is now a husband.

Women have come a long way as far as their persona both on screen and off, but Reality TV seems to have us working our way back in time not progressing forward toward the future. Women shown on these programs possess a certain amount of naivety that comes off as ditzyness and weakness. This weakness we can relate back to 19th century literature where the woman that wasn't married by her late twenties was destined to become an Old Maid. Let us flash back to Andrew Firestone in the third installment of *The Bachelor* when he sent a teary eyed Christine home to New Jersey because she was too aggressive. Did he send her home because she was too old? The oldest of the lot, Christine was a woman who knew what she wanted and went after it. In other words, she was a woman of today; with the troubling ethos of a 19th century lady (Cohen, 2003). The arranged marriages of conveniences and the respectable marriages of money in the Victorian and Edwardian eras strike fascinating similarities in our modern day dating rituals. Well at least the ones based on Reality TV. The old way of organized events in the effort to put two people in each others arms is mimicked today on every type of dating show now being aired. Twenty of them in all, at last count. Although they lack the wit, depth and cleverness of Jane Austen's women; these girls – especially on a show such as *Cupid* – are alike them in the respect that they “put themselves in the hand of others” (Cohen, 2003). Friends share in their decision, or even sometimes make it for them because after all, no girl is qualified to make such a serious decision. Edith Wharton's Lily Bart proclaimed in *The House of Mirth*, “The cleverest girl may

miscalculate where her own interests are concerned, may yield too much at one moment and withdraw too far at the next.”

Reality TV has also become a sort of new acting school and casting agent. Models and actors alike who are trying to break into “The Business” wind up on Reality TV to get noticed. Many have gone on to bigger and better things. Elisabeth Hasselbeck from *Survivor* has now replace Lisa Ling of *The View*, Aaron Buerge of *The Bachelor* is acting in a new independent film. Not so bad for former “nobodies” carrying on with their lives as any of us would on a day-to-day basis! It’s the other careers that have been launched from appearances on Reality TV programs that cause concern for the impact these shows have on our society, more specifically on young women. We can’t forget Kirsten from *The Bachelor* and her darting glances of death toward an inquisitive Andrew. Where is she now? She performed in a Broadway show entitled “Pieces (of Ass)” at Theatre 80 in New York City over the summer. She is a member of a list of guest stars each scheduled to appear for an average of two nights a piece. Along with Kirsten are some other Reality TV alumni such as Trishelle Cannatella from MTV’s *Real World* and Jenna Morasca the winner of *Survivor: The Amazon*. The play is based on “original monologues from a rotating cast of beautiful women, all dealing with themes uniquely common to the physically blessed female; the perks and privileges, the problems, and the pressures.” (Brian Howie, 2003) Can we get you a tissue? We remember Kirsten on *The Bachelor*, was there anything physically blessed about her? The concept of the play; although artistic and beautiful is lost in the title alone. Would you want to tell your family you’re starring in a play entitled using derogatory phrases of women?

Other women who couldn't quite make it in showbiz were found on the pages of Playboy. Many *Survivor* players were photographed for the magazine including Jenna Morasca. However, *Joe Millionaire* cast member Sara Kocer defines the very essence of what we try extremely hard to teach our daughters not to be. Her already famous reputation for starring in bondage and fetish films to get her through law school was heightened when after her turn on *Joe Millionaire* she posed for Playboy after previously saying no. The cover of the issue reads "*SARA NUDE: What Joe Millionaire Missed*". Well here's a newsflash Sara: Not for long! The old adage "don't get mad, get even" just doesn't seem to work here and in the same respect shows a contradictory perspective to what our children are taught at a young age.

Conclusion

Reality TV programs have taught us a lot. First and foremost, they are not really real. At best, their "flexible scripts" (Kaufman, 2002) are no more a trashy soap opera than anything that accurately documents human behavior and provides us insight into the complex realm of modern dating. On television, there is a constant competition to gain an ultimate prize or possession. Real life is nothing of this kind. Sure, we all strive for bigger and better things and circumstances for ourselves and our families, and sure we do compete for the better position, the better job and maybe even for the better machine at the Laundromat; but for the most part we are not in an organized game of seeking an ultimate possession.

On television, everyone seeks this ultimate prize and does so with deceit, betrayal and downright cattiness. The old adage of "sex sells" drives producers to create even

racier and trashier concepts in order to lure viewers to their living rooms on a nightly basis (see *The Apprentice Handbook on Business Solutions: Selling Lemonade with Nothing but a Miniskirt and a Tube Top*). The result is an onslaught of moral dilemmas, degrading gender-based examples, and disastrous ideas propelling a once successful and entertainment worthy medium. The increase in Reality TV programming this past season gave many more note-worthy activities to do such as “sit on their decks and watch the changing phases of the moon” (NY Times editorial statement).

If Reality TV is where television will end up, we are about to witness its death, right in front of us, live on the air, in all its Technicolor greatness.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE PLAN OF ATTACK:

**Research Design
&
Methodology**



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The research conducted for this project was based on factual rating numbers, news articles, magazine articles and the actual programs themselves. A survey and interview (a sample can be seen in this chapter and in the Appendix) were created to get a general idea of the actual feelings and ideas the general public had about Reality TV programming. Overall, informal conversations were conducted in social settings to not only get a better idea of individual thought processes but also to study the behavior of individuals that discuss the subject.

Through the course of the research for this project, formal interviews that were conducted and surveys that were handed out and collected provided a rigid and even at times contrived sort of insight into the phenomena of Reality TV. Informal conversations, prompted by the author, provided more in depth analysis of the general and specific attitude toward Reality TV and TV in general. In addition, human behavior and feelings were able to be noted during these group conversations which proved extremely valuable in the points made in this project.

First the survey, which is delineated on the following pages, that was handed out to over one hundred randomly selected people in the states of New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Delaware. A similar version of this survey was published online and

distributed throughout the country with a total of thirty-two respondents in 10 days. The participants in this survey were part of all walks of life, demographics, regions, race, ethnic backgrounds and socioeconomic brackets. As mentioned before, this project focused on the relationship – based and romance – based programs of the Reality TV genre. The survey defined for the participants the concept of relationship-based reality programs and gave examples of such shows. The survey was designed with the top ten factors of why an individual would watch a reality-based program on any given night.

The survey was designed using the power rating scale. Using numbers to best describe the rate at why we watch certain is defined with the number five being the highest or the “absolutely that is why I watch it” rating and the number one being the lowest or the “no, this is absolutely why I do not watch it” rating. Actual images from the most popular romance-based reality programs were chosen for easier recognition by the surveyed participants.

Figure 4.1 – The Survey

Reality TV: Why Do We Watch?

The purpose of this survey is to aid in the research for the exploration and understanding of the sociological and psychological impact of Reality TV, and more specifically Relationship-Based Reality TV, on the American culture. This research is done to fulfill the thesis requirement of a Master of Arts in Corporate and Public Communication at Seton Hall University. The results of this survey will help the researcher obtain a broader view of the general opinion and thoughts about the impact of Reality TV on our society.

All survey responses will be kept confidential. If you would like to know the final outcome of this survey and the conclusions of the research, please contact me at TJRuocco@hotmail.com.

Completed surveys can be returned to the following address:

Tiffany Ruocco
101 Chester-Arney Road
Wrightstown, New Jersey 08562
TJRuocco@hotmail.com

Your participation in this project is greatly appreciated.

Thank you.



The Bachelor 3
Andrew Firestone & Jennifer Schefft



For Love or Money 2
Erin Brodie & Gang



The Bachelorette
Trista Rehn

Relationship-Based Reality TV Shows

Relationship-Based Reality TV shows pertain to any programming that is advertised, sold and presented as a non-scripted show based on “live” and “real” relationships between serious characters that are selected through an audition process. These shows include but are not limited to: The Bachelor, The Bachelorette, Joe Millionaire, and For Love or Money.

Part I: Survey Questions

Based on the power rating scale below, with **5** being the **highest** and **1** being the **lowest**, please circle the answer that most closely represents your opinion.

For the most part, I watch Relationship-Based Reality TV, such as The Bachelor, The Bachelorette, Joe Millionaire, and For Love or Money, for:

	High			Low	
1. Drama	5	4	3	2	1
2. Escape/break from my own reality	5	4	3	2	1
3. For the intrigue/suspense (I want to see how it turns out)	5	4	3	2	1
4. "Water cooler" talk (I want to be in the loop at work)	5	4	3	2	1
5. Insight into dating	5	4	3	2	1
6. Exposure to interesting worlds (i.e. <i>Joe Millionaire</i>)	5	4	3	2	1
7. In general, more interesting plot	5	4	3	2	1
8. Better than watching the news or sports	5	4	3	2	1
9. Interesting characters	5	4	3	2	1
10. Comedic element	5	4	3	2	1

Please offer any additional thoughts or comments:

Part II: Optional Questions

Please answer any, some or all of the questions below.

Gender: ___ Male ___ Female

Age: ___ 21-30 ___ 31-40
 ___ 41-50 ___ 51-60
 ___ 61-70 ___ 70 or above

Level of Education: ___ High School Graduate ___ Some College
 ___ Undergraduate ___ Some Graduate
 ___ Graduate ___ Post-graduate
 ___ Some Doctorate ___ Doctorate
 ___ Post-doctorate
Other: _____

Occupation: _____

Title: _____

I have never watched a Relationship-Based Reality Television show ☐

THANK YOU!

The questions or statements that were included in the survey were designed with the analysis of why we are drawn to anything as the basic rules of human nature apply. These factors create the top ten reasons why we watch Reality TV programming, in general. Rocco DiSpirito said it best in the American Express commercial promoting his Reality TV show *The Restaurant* when he asked the general viewing public their own question: *"Why do a reality show about opening a restaurant?...Because everyone knows that starting a small business is never short on drama."* So here we have the first factor that is cited in the survey, The Element of Drama.

Drama, in any aspect, is a major influence in why we do certain things. The best example is driving by a car accident. We complain about the people in front of us that stop to look and then in retrospect create a traffic jam. But what are the people in the cars behind this person doing? They are stopping and looking. Its not that we want to see blood or see others in a life-threatening situation, but the movie that is playing before our eyes intrigues us for a number of reasons. Call it human nature, call it curiosity, call it whatever you want to call it, we still look and can't take our eyes away until we are past the scene and go on our way. Then, the images play over and over in our heads until we have an opportunity to tell the story to someone else. Just like Reality TV shows; we complain about how stupid they are, how many there are and how people can possibly watch them. We turn the channel to a reality-based program and share our disbelief that there are shows like this on network television, but yet we don't turn the channel.

The second concept is that of escaping from our own reality. Although not many people seem to admit to it, which we will touch upon later, Reality TV is mindless entertainment that allows us to step out of our own world for a moment and view

someone else's. How much of it is actually real does not seem to play in our mind, all we know and comprehend is that it is not happening to us.

The third factor is the suspense and intrigue factor. The same way that we watch a movie from beginning to end, Reality TV programs are intriguing to the viewer because we have no idea how they will turn out. The other beautiful side to this factor is the confidentiality factor that the networks have with the contestants. How can one possibly keep a secret for that long? We all know that these shows are taped in advance; well OK, you know now. While the show is being aired, the potential couple is kept apart in their respective towns or cities and only has contact through the phone lines. They are not even supposed to tell their closets relatives and friends about the outcome of the show in fear that the ending will be leaked to the general public. So of course, this creates a new intrigue factor. The "*After the*" show that airs at the end of the program's run brings these couples together for the first time in public. Not only that, but the person that they did not pick is brought into the studio to ask the wondrous question of "Why?" The intrigue, suspense and anticipation of this moment brings even more viewers to their living rooms.

There is a phenomenon in the workplace that many people are aware of and still some choose to ignore. The water cooler loop in any office can be a daunting and scary little clique. If you don't know what you are talking about when entering this circle, you can consider your membership revoked or not even granted in the first place. This usually spills out into the lunch order pool as well. The desire to be in this circle at work is another factor in why viewers will tune into a certain program. If not for solid conversation, then to see what all the fuss is about.

Many dating shows, and now even competitive shows such as *The Apprentice*, can give some of us insight into something, at least. Shows such as *The Bachelor* and *The Bachelorette* are interesting in the respect that we can't wait to see the reaction of the contestants and to hear in their words what they are looking for, how they go about it, etc. These shows have the ability to provide us insight into dating and other relationships that we may encounter on a daily basis. Just as Donald Trump gives us a Business 101 course during his hour long Competitive – Reality TV program *The Apprentice* (the best show ever to grace the small screen), watching Matthew Hickl charm Meredith on *The Bachelorette* provides us with some information as well. How you interpret that information is entirely up to you.

Another factor involved in Reality TV is the exposure it gives us to other worlds. The author can admit that the reason she couldn't wait to watch *Joe Millionaire* every Monday night was because they gave us that beautiful chateau, and they rode through the French countryside, and for an hour every week she forgot that she had a thesis to write. Of course, since it was *Joe Millionaire*, we can call it research. Even shows that are filmed here show us a different angle of every day American life. The mansions that the contestants stay in are rented to the network for the use of filming. These mansions are owned by private citizens, makes you kind of drool doesn't it? How do we view them? Do we run a story through our heads, play a movie over and over again? Imagine ourselves walking down the grand staircase? Sure we do, because we yearn to taste something we know nothing about.

The last four factors included in the survey co-exist nicely. For the most part, "a more interesting plot", "better than watching news and sports", "interesting characters"

and “comedic element” provide a solid definition of why we turn to anything new. Our minds crave change and after awhile there really isn’t that much of a change on television as far as programming is considered. So we watch Reality TV because as we all know, there really isn’t anything else on at this point, the people that are chosen have qualities about their personalities that producers know will intrigue us into tuning in and they also provide us with a good laugh when they do something stupid.

Overall these factors are used as a general guide to provide insight into why Reality TV has become such a great part of our culture. These factors encapsulate the reasons why humans behave the way they do, whether its watching a car accident or watching *Joe Millionaire*. However, the survey alone only provides this study with a general idea behind the phenomenon. In addition to the survey, formal interviews were conducted as well as informal group discussions in a social setting. Below is an example of the interview questions that were used in the formal interview setting:

Figure 4.2 – The Interview



Interview Questions

1. In general, how would you describe the impact of television on our society in America?
2. Do you think it has a positive impact or a negative one?
3. How many hours a day do you watch television?
 - A. How many days a week?
4. What is the age range of the television watchers in your family?
5. For the most part, do you buy products you see advertised on television?
 - A. If yes, when do you see these advertisements? (i.e. primetime, daytime, morning)
 - B. If no, from what source are you more influenced? (i.e. newspapers, mailers, etc.)
6. Define for me the term "Reality TV".
7. Reality TV has become an enormous phenomenon in this country. Why do you think it has exploded as it did?
8. Do you watch reality - based programs?
 - A. If yes, why do you watch them and what are they?
 - B. If no, why not?
9. In general, what do you think the sociological impact of these shows is on our society?
10. What do you think the sociological impact of these shows is on dating age or younger women?

The purpose of these interview questions was to get a feel for the rate of usage, viewing and age of viewers in a given household. The questions also touched on the concept and theory of the impact that television has on the culture as a general theory and also the impact it has on young women in our society. The interview questions were handed to individuals to fill out as an essay type of questionnaire and were also conducted during one-on-one, in-person interviews.

Even with these interviews, the author still found a stifling aspect of the answers she received. She wanted to know if this was a reaction of her own perception or if in fact participants were influenced by the conditions under which they were interviewed and surveyed. In an attempt to remedy this situation, she set out taking notes, both mental and written, during social interactions with various groups of people; during the times of open discussion, most often than not the concept of Reality TV came up for debate. Sometimes this was prompted by the author, but for the most part Reality TV almost always came up on its own free will. This is when the author put a smile on her face, closed her mouth, opened her ears and started the mental typewriter in her head.

The findings validated a lot of her initial opinions and ideas. When studying human behavior, the environment we put our subjects in is as crucial as the questions we ask them. The same is true and raises a great argument for debate with Reality TV shows. How real are people going to act when they are put in front of a camera and an entire production team? The findings in the author's research are quite entertaining. In fact, they are so entertaining that she almost thought of redistributing the survey to all of those that claimed they never watched Reality TV. You would be surprised to hear what some

people admit when they get in a heated topic of debate! Still, there are deadlines to be made and papers to be written so the redistribution of the survey never took place. However, the results of these revelations are forever noted in the mental notebook of the author – a notebook that has a large and virtually indestructible hard drive.

The research needed for this project was mainly based in human perception and behavior. Due to the relatively new nature of the Reality TV genre, this method of research was almost required. There are few books written on Reality TV and only a handful of articles written about the impact it has on our everyday lives. Therefore, the printed research used for this project was based on factual ratings conducted by Nielson Media Research, statistics pertaining to the number of shows and what networks sign them on as well as the actual reactions, thoughts and ideas of contestants, producers, creators and directors that are involved in the show and its production. These ideas and perceptions were collected from hours of television watching, magazine reading and internet surfing. Reality TV has such a profound hold on our culture that almost every contestant is seen as a celebrity, every creator a hero and every host an expert on human behavior. It was hard not to find an interview with someone who had anything to do with a given Reality TV program.

During the course of this research, the author came across numerous points that were defined as revelations, numerous others that were validations and yet others that were simply quite comical. In the next chapter, we will begin to analyze the findings of this study and how many people actually refuse to admit that they too are addicted to Reality TV.

That's right - addicted to Reality TV.

CHAPTER FIVE

**DON'T LIE:
THE NUMBERS PROVE ALL**

Research Results & Conclusions

“There is a strong sense that Reality TV is the perfect televisual form for the contemporary cultural moment.”

Jon Dovey, Freakshow

Exactly how many people are watching Reality TV programs? Let’s look at a few diminutive facts:

- The original *Average Joe* series catapulted NBC to the highest demographic rating in the 18-49 range and in the Monday, 9pm – 11pm time slot in more than 10 years.
- *Average Joe* (again) dominated its two-hour time period in all key Adults and Adult Female viewing demographics.
- 1 out of every 5 Americans watched the finale of *Joe Millionaire* “when hunky Evan Marriot revealed to the women he picked that he really wasn’t a millionaire” (Associated Press, 2003).
- *Average Joe* had a tough time slot to contend with. Its Monday night, 9pm – 11pm time slot placed it opposite *Monday Night Football* (A.K.A. *America’s Pastime*) – *Average Joe* prevailed outperforming its ABC heavy-hitter by 44% and 1.3 million viewers. *Average Joe* total viewers = 17.4 million
Monday Night Football total viewers = 16.1 million
- In 2002, the finale of the second installment of *The Bachelor* annihilated the famed and controversial *Victoria’s Secret TV Special* raking in an average of 24.1 million viewers to Vicki’s 10.5 million viewers.

Need more? The numbers in the ratings alone is enough to prove that Reality TV is a major part of our televised culture. The shows themselves occupy an average of seven hours of air time in a given season. Enough people watch to encourage the powers that be to move *Extreme Makeover* to Wednesday nights so not to interfere with *The Apprentice* on Thursday. The Writers Guild of America estimates that Reality TV programming generates \$4.2 billion in net revenue with only \$2.23 billion in total production and overhead costs (Paulsen, 2003).

Two angles are present here. First, this validates Reality TV as a less expensive avenue to produce entertaining programs due to the lower or non-existent salaries of the “stars” of the show. If there is no outrageous Hollywood paycheck that needs to be cut, studios receive more in profit. Second, it proves that there are a lot of people out there watching these programs and therefore businesses yearn and scurry for the advertising spots during these shows due to the massive audience they target and reel in. It therefore makes perfect business sense to create and market more and more Reality TV programs.

The surprising element of the facts presented here and the staggering comparison of numbers is that Reality TV isn’t new. In fact “there really isn’t anything on television right now whose roots don’t go back forty years.” (Kisseloff, 1995). Just as clothing trends and social hotspots as well as interior designs constantly shuffle themselves in a cycle of recycling, television is no different. Shows that are prevalent today can find a similar foundation in the programs of yesterday. But the craze is real, after all, the people watching Reality TV, weren’t alive or were very young when some of their counterparts were popular.

In the course of the research, it was found that people watch Reality TV for a variety of reasons, all of which were included in the survey. Still, others refused to admit they watch, and then there are some (OK, the author alone), who never watched a show before in her life and now has found herself completely addicted. So much so that her teaching schedule is designed around the times of such shows as *The Apprentice* and *The Bachelor*. Let's see what people had to say.....

Survey Results

For the following statements the power rating scale was used with 5 being a high rating and 1 being a low rating.

Statement #1: For the most part, I watch Relationship – Based Reality TV shows because of the element of drama.

5	4	3	2	1
15%	38%	10%	19%	38%

For this statement, there is a split between a complete disagreement (or an answer of one) and a strong agreement (or an answer of 4). Generally speaking, women who responded tended to agree with this statement more so than the male population with 23% of women answering with a number four and 26% of all men answering with a number one. Certain

stereotypes may be called into play here citing that in general women are more emotional creatures by nature and therefore desire drama more so than their male counterparts.

Statement #2: For the most part, I watch Relationship – Based Reality TV shows in order to escape from my own reality.

5	4	3	2	1
25%	29%	15%	10%	15%

The response to this question was a bit more balanced with 25% of the women responding with a strong agreement (or answer of 5) and 19% of the men agreeing with the women and answering with a 4. This factor plays out over and over again as a main reason why Reality TV has become so popular in our culture, especially after the atrocities of September 11, 2001. Reality TV has become our common ground between cultures, professions, economic standing, etc. These programs have brought us to a meeting place where we forget about the horror of the world and the war and suffering that is taking place. Here, everything is clean and pretty, no one has to be afraid of being shot or raped and they may even take home a few million along the way.

Statement #3: For the most part, I watch Relationship – Based Reality TV shows for the intrigue or the suspense (I want to know how it will turn out).

5	4	3	2	1
49%	36%	.05%	15%	21%

Similar to the reasons why we can't look away from a car accident, the same holds true with Reality TV. Eighty-five percent of all respondents agreed that they too are interested in how the program will end. Who will get the girl? Who will get the guy? How will the loser react? Once we get that first taste of a program, even through a quick trip of channel surfing, sometimes that is all we need to stay tuned in. This is what television producers count on. It is how they get paid, how they get ratings and how they lobby for more shows, just like the ones we seem to not have the strength to turn away from.

Statement #4: For the most part, I watch Relationship – Based Reality TV shows in order to be “in the loop” at work (water cooler talk).

5	4	3	2	1
10%	21%	14%	29%	71%

Surprisingly, not many people feel the need to tune in to a program simply to have something in common with the coffee breakers at the office. It is surprising in the sense

that we spend most of our time at the office with our co-workers, therefore a majority of our conversations take place at the office. For all of us accustomed to working in close knit office spaces we know that the topic of conversation is one that usually everyone takes part in. However, when it comes to Reality TV, 71% of all respondents say that it isn't necessary for them to be "in the loop" at the office. Whether this is an example of what people are talking about in their downtime or an example of how much Reality TV does not resonate into other areas of our lives remains to be seen. For the most part, conversations of Reality TV tend to be more frequent in close-knit friends and/or family circles instead of the circle around the water cooler.

Statement #5: For the most part, I watch Relationship -- Based Reality TV shows for insight into dating.

5	4	3	2	1
.05%	.05%	.07%	.09%	99%

Not that anyone would really admit this even if it was true, but we tend to look toward others when we inquire about relationships. On many different levels we confide, question and try to apply many different strategies and plans in order to have a relationship work. Reality TV may not be the best place to get this advice, but it can be a telling area of how people react and accept certain situations. However, the question of real versus staged comes into play here as how can people truly act natural when there are

four cameras on them and an entire production team waiting for the final cut. Well, apparently 99% of all respondents agree with the second statement, because after all we all know that Reality TV is as scripted as the next show.

Statement #6: For the most part, I watch Relationship – Based Reality TV shows for the exposure to other worlds.

5	4	3	2	1
.12%	.08%	.09%	26%	76%

So Reality TV isn't the travel guide that was once thought. Maybe its just the author who dreams of cascading down the grand staircase of the mansions or riding her horse through the French countryside.

Statement #7: For the most part, I watch Relationship – Based Reality TV shows because they have a more interesting plot.

5	4	3	2	1
.12%	19%	.07%	30%	56%

As the concept of Reality TV has been unfurled we should know that these shows should not have plots at all, now should they? But of course, we all know better than that and so do 56% of all respondents who disagree that they have interesting plots in the first place as compared to other programs on the air.

Statement #8: For the most part, I watch Relationship – Based Reality TV shows because they are better than watching the news or sports.

5	4	3	2	1
17%	10%	12%	.12%	66%

This statement was an interesting one in that the number respondents circled and the additional comments they added at the bottom of the page contradicted one another. Sixty-six percent of all respondents said that they do not prefer watching Reality TV over the news or sports but then added comments that indicated they would rather watch Reality TV before they watched a news or sporting program. In addition, many respondents complained of “having nothing else to watch” for being the reason they in fact do watch Reality TV programs. On the other side of this are the respondents that watch Reality TV programs that do not conflict with the common news or sporting event programs they normally tune in to. Interesting.

Statement #9: For the most part, I watch Relationship – Based Reality TV shows for the interesting characters.

5	4	3	2	1
15%	43%	26%	14%	29%

The networks know what they are doing when they cast people in these roles. They choose people that have controversy, that bring an element of drama, that have a little mystery. All of these are elements that get us to tune in and keep us watching. It is no surprise that both the men and the women answered with a four rating on this question. Proving that with a little drama, a little show can go a long way.

Statement #10: For the most part, I watch Relationship – Based Reality TV shows for the comedic element.

5	4	3	2	1
66%	25%	19%	.05%	.12%

If all the cast members of these shows knew that we were simply watching to get a good laugh, do you think they would be happy? Or maybe they too sit at home and laugh at themselves? Whatever the situation we can be sure that one of the greatest things about

Reality TV is our ability to watch other people make complete fools out of themselves on national television, somehow it makes us feel good about ourselves.

Interview Results

The results of the various interviews both informal and formal rang true with a similar tune. Television, in general has a great and profound affect on us as individuals, as a society and as a culture. Even worse, the affects that it has on children, especially young women, concerns a lot of people. Television has taken away our creativity, and our ability to spend time with our families. But some people think that the impact television has had on our society is more about the environment and the family life a child has had and not so much the television itself. This is a valid point, given that it is our environment as children where we learn how to control the internal and external forces that persuade our minds.

Another issue that many participants brought to the discussion was the disassembling of the institution of marriage. Many questions come to mind when this issue is raised: is it really possible to find love in a hot tub with ten other women? Is it possible to find your soul-mate and fall in love and trust him with all that you are in six weeks? For the most part, Reality TV alludes to relationships that are not made-for-marriage material. In fact engagement rings are thrown around as if they are simply another piece of jewelry waiting to be purchased and worn. There is no true commitment, how can there be? There is only a selected amount of time and for most of that time the

two people that are trying to fall in love are also distracted by this group of women, or men, that are after the same thing.

This concept puts a great strain on what we are trying to instill in our children. The values and morals that were once sacred to our society don't seem to exist anymore. The problem falls when these shows promote happy, pretty, tiny girls with perfect makeup and perfect clothes getting the gorgeous, rich and confident man. Does this happen in real life? Maybe but nothing is perfect and we run the risk of forcing our children, especially our young women, to think that you have to be perfect in order to be happy and successful. Women have a hard enough time as it is with the magazines and newspapers selling perfection, now we have it thrown to an even more massive audience on television.

Reality TV takes a great gamble with the format of these shows. Love is thrown around blatantly as if nothing is at stake, marriage is no longer something that you do with the person you would die for; it is simply something you do and women are once again put in a role where they end up looking foolish and unintelligent. Even a producer of one reality-based show admitted that "This is great TV... if you're a whore" (Wetherell, 2003).

Hopefully, the shows we tune into week after week are catching an older audience that realize and understand that this is not how it really happens in real life. Fortunately, the main targeted audience for these shows is women over the age of 18 years which would bring them to the eyes of someone who is hopefully comfortable enough with themselves at this point that a television show will not be able to deter them from logical thought processes. As long as we keep watching for the suspense of how it will turn out,

the interesting characters the producers never fail at drumming up, the ability to escape from our own stressful realities of the day and for a good old-fashioned laugh at the end of the day, Reality TV will be nothing more than the entertainment it was meant to be. But we all know better than that, and we know that at any time we too can fall into the trap of addiction.

Somewhat in the same way the author has....

CHAPTER SIX

REALITY TV:

**Why We Watch It
And
Why We Love It**

***“Of course there’s a war, I’m watching it on TV”
Robert DeNiro as Conrad Brean in Wag the Dog***

The culture of the America we once knew is seemingly nonexistent anymore. We are inundated and influenced by a greater power: that greater power has come to be known as reality.

But not just any reality - the reality that is sold to us on television. It targets every subculture within our culture (see Figure 6.1), hooking its audience with a razor sharp edge and showing them every annoying, intriguing and downright stupid behavior we can possibly create as human beings. In this reality we create our own stories, give birth to new connections and foster new behavior. The culture that has been born through Reality TV has created all of this for us. We no longer have a true sense of what is actually real anymore. To us, Meredith wanting a free spirit instead of a stable romantic is real. It’s what we desire deep down in our hearts whether we want to admit it or not.

The truth that lies underneath of it all is our innate desire of longing for what we cannot have, always hoping for a happy ending and loving all the drama we can possibly get along the way. This is even better if we are not expending the energy, the heartache and the embarrassment ourselves; we leave that to others that are brave enough to have their souls splattered on national television. Television brings all of this right to our living room. For every one young and old, married or single, rich or poor, ugly and handsome, annoying and kind. We don’t see the crew members, we don’t see the cameras, and we don’t see the elaborate sets. What we do see is carefully edited and strategically plan

reality unfolding before our eyes. The camera, we are led to believe, is our tiny peephole into the lives of others.

**Figure 6.1 – Sub-Cultures and
Their Television Counterparts**

Sub-Culture	Reality Program
Models	<i>America's Top Model</i>
Type-A Sharks	<i>The Apprentice</i>
Single & Sexy	<i>The Bachelor</i> <i>The Bachelorette</i>
Singers	<i>American Idol</i>
Teeny-Boppers	<i>Real World</i>
Single Dads	<i>Who Wants to Marry My Dad?</i>
Unfaithful Spouse	<i>Temptation Island</i> <i>Paradise Hotel</i>
Doctors	<i>Life in the E.R.</i>
Socialites	<i>The Simple Life</i>

Figure 6.2 - Five Lessons Learned From Reality TV Programs

Lesson #1	Reality TV is not about reality – it’s about greed.
Lesson #2	In life there is nothing to win – there is no ultimate prize.
Lesson #3	Life does not have a soundtrack – although it should.
Lesson #4	On TV there are no mistakes – editing is a beautiful thing (“..soap operas with a flexible script”).
Lesson #5	There are cameras in their faces.

Source: “Lessons from the Love Cruise: The ‘Reality’ of Reality Television” by Ron Kaufman, 2003

The purpose and initial idea behind this study was to bring to light the impact that Reality TV and more generally TV itself has on us as individuals and as a whole. This impact can not be better described then in this quote by Nicholas Johnson:

“Television is one of the most powerful forces man has ever unleashed upon himself. The quality of human life may depend enormously upon our efforts to comprehend and control that force.”

Now, let’s revisit the initial questions asked of this thesis. We know why people watch these shows; to be a part of something communal, to escape from their own realities, to take in the drama and sometimes just to have a good laugh. Children watch to

be like the older and bigger girls in the family, they mimic our every action and behavior. The shows give light on how people interact in an otherwise stuffy situation, proving that no matter how kind of a person you are, when put in a close-knit apartment for weeks with limited access to the outside world, anyone is bound to lose it. And what makes one of our most eligible bachelors in America want to find his soul mate in front of millions of people? Andrew Firestone set out on an adventure, similar to taking a road trip to an unforeseen village or town, he craved a life experience. When you're young and single and looking for love, you tend to not rule anything out. Television has become yet another option for the dating singles in our culture, just another opportunity to meet Mr. Right. However Andrew knew what his responsibilities were; he realized that "there were two different dramas going on: making a television show and making a relationship", he knew that he had to keep people interested in watching him at the same time he was trying to find a potential wife (Redbook, pg. 114, 2003). Here we have our prime contestant, a producer's sweetest dream, a real guy, wealth and all, knowing that he has to put on a show. Here is the making of a successful Reality TV program.

The creation doesn't stop there however. Reality TV has spilled onto the big screen with movies such as *The Real Cancun* and *Real World: The Movie*. Spring break is now an observed adventure instead of an experienced secret. Parents were fine with their children going away in the middle of the semester because basically what they didn't know didn't hurt them. Now we have a movie to watch over and over again; two young people having sex right on camera for billions of people to see over and over again. Is this art? Years ago, we would have called it pornography and burned the tape or else locked it up in a vault so no one could see. Now we call it reality and it has become

acceptable. The decision to create *Real World: The Movie* onto the big screen sort of defeats the purpose of the program. It was the frontrunner, the trendsetter in reality programming, now it's a movie with a script. So what's next? *The Apprentice* on the big screen? *American Idol* at the movies? Seems as though we will have to wait and see.

The sociological ramifications of Reality TV may be something that will be brought into a brighter light in the years to come. So far, however, television has become just another source of self-degradation. Women for years have had magazines showing them what a perfect and beautiful woman should look like; it didn't do anything for our self-esteem then and now we can look at those pages and accept that these models live very grueling lifestyles. Some do drugs and starve themselves to stay thin, others simply lose weight from the lack of sleep they get and the amount of stress they must undergo. We already know that movie stars are gorgeous, they can afford to be; with their personal trainers, private chefs and their very own hair dressers and makeup artists. It's their job to look good at all times.

Now what about the average woman in America? First, she is about a size 14. Second, she has to balance career with family with house with dinner, etc., the list goes on. Third, she gets tired of dressing up and sometimes she just wants to wear some sweatpants. She's an average woman, a real woman. Reality TV is supposed to be showing us real people. Instead, once again, thrown in our faces are these gorgeous, completely manicured women that have it all (except love or else they wouldn't be on the show!). Is this an accurate representation of the American woman? Not so much, now we sit back and think – “well, I don't look like Demi Moore but that's OK because after all she is a movie star.” – That's fine, but now with Reality TV it is becoming harder and

harder to even relate to the “average” woman on TV. She looks just like the Hollywood star on the next channel. What does this do to women in this country? What does it say about our culture? Reality TV is yet another example of what we expect of our citizens: perfection, in every way.

As the author, the direct impact it has taken on my life is enormous. I not only have become addicted to shows such as *The Bachelor*, *The Bachelorette* and *The Apprentice*, but I have learned a few things along the way. *The Bachelorette* has taught me that there are plenty of men out there that are successful, good looking and still single. *The Bachelor* has taught me that those men would never go for a strong, intelligent, talented and independent woman like me. However, *For Love or Money* has taught me that anyone can find a soul mate when there is \$2 million at stake. So in other words, there is still hope.

All in all, Reality TV has taught me that we view our lives by the successes, failures, trials and tribulations of others. Is this wrong and insecure? Not necessarily, it's simply called human behavior. No matter how we try to deny it or how we try to avoid it, Reality TV becomes our crutch in a world where we have to live with hundreds of people dying at the hands of Al-Qaida every day; a world where our soldiers are at war every waking and sleeping minute and a world where the Hollywood starlet is seen as the great American dream.

This is not reality as we play it in our minds. To us it is a dream, one that only true Hollywood movies are made of and New York Times Best Sellers are written about. Our minds do not play a story of war and death; we play the story of a white picket fence and a big white house with black shutters and two cars in the driveway. We play a story

of our children becoming lawyers and doctors, not drug addicts and murderers. And the movie plays on. Our true reality lies in the hour long programs we watch every night of the week. There on the small screen is the everyday person, given a chance to meet Mr. or Miss Right in front of all of our eyes. The venue is not so much your typical first date locale, but all the players are the same. In this world, the house is beautiful, the clothes are chic, and the hair and makeup is perfect. In this world there is no war; there is no Osama bin Laden; there is no September 11, 2001; there is no March 11, 2004; there is no bad credit and untidy house; there are no animals to feed and no hearts to break. Every week we watch and we crave more and more. We watch them make mistakes; we watch them fall in love. We watch them argue and fight. We cheer for the nice guy and jeer the bitchy woman.

Reality TV has become the reason we still smile; the reason we go to work in the morning. It is our break from the news flash of another bombing and another 300 people killed. We watch because our minds need the break from our own reality and for an hour every night or every week we get just that. In addition to it we get a good laugh now and again. For a small percentage of time we are able to live someone else's life. The pain and suffering they feel, we simply scoff at; after all it isn't directly affecting us in any way and for some reason we don't even believe that it is really affecting them. If it does, by the end of the week the bad feeling is gone. We dive into their happiness head first and smile along with them at the same time we condemn their bad decisions. We don't get hurt, we don't get betrayed, we don't get played and we don't get touched. In the end, it's the best reality one could possibly live.



Drawing by Modell; © 1976, The New Yorker Magazine, Inc.

Source: Mediaamerica, Edward Jay Whetmore, page 23, 1979

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: The Survey

Reality TV: Why Do We Watch?

The purpose of this survey is to aid in the research for the exploration and understanding of the sociological and psychological impact of Reality TV, and more specifically Relationship-Based Reality TV, on the American culture. This research is done to fulfill the thesis requirement of a Master of Arts in Corporate and Public Communication at Seton Hall University. The results of this survey will help the researcher obtain a broader view of the general opinion and thoughts about the impact of Reality TV on our society.

All survey responses will be kept confidential. If you would like to know the final outcome of this survey and the conclusions of the research, please contact me at TJRuocco@hotmail.com.

Completed surveys can be returned to the following address:

Tiffany Ruocco
101 Chester-Arney Road
Wrightstown, New Jersey 08562
TJRuocco@hotmail.com

Your participation in this project is greatly appreciated.

Thank you.



The Bachelor 3
Andrew Firestone & Jennifer Schefft



For Love or Money 2
Erin Brodie & Gang



The Bachelorette
Trista Rehn

Relationship-Based Reality TV Shows

Relationship-Based Reality TV shows pertains to any programming that is advertised, sold and presented as a non-scripted show based on "live" and "real" relationships between serious characters that are selected through an audition process. These shows include but are not limited to: The Bachelor, The Bachelorette, Joe Millionaire, and For Love or Money.

Part I: Survey Questions

Based on the power rating scale below, with 5 being the **highest** and 1 being the **lowest**, please circle the answer that most closely represents your opinion.

For the most part, I watch Relationship-Based Reality TV, such as The Bachelor, The Bachelorette, Joe Millionaire, and For Love or Money, for:

	High			Low	
1. Drama	5	4	3	2	1
2. Escape/break from my own reality	5	4	3	2	1
3. For the intrigue/suspense (I want to see how it turns out)	5	4	3	2	1
4. "Water cooler" talk (I want to be in the loop at work)	5	4	3	2	1
5. Insight into dating	5	4	3	2	1
6. Exposure to interesting worlds (i.e. <i>Joe Millionaire</i>)	5	4	3	2	1
7. In general, more interesting plot	5	4	3	2	1
8. Better than watching the news or sports	5	4	3	2	1
9. Interesting characters	5	4	3	2	1
10. Comedic element	5	4	3	2	1

Please offer any additional thoughts or comments:

Part II: Optional Questions

Please answer any, some or all of the questions below.

Gender: ___ Male ___ Female

Age: ___ 21-30 ___ 31-40
 ___ 41-50 ___ 51-60
 ___ 61-70 ___ 70 or above

Level of Education: ___ High School Graduate ___ Some College
 ___ Undergraduate ___ Some Graduate
 ___ Graduate ___ Post-graduate
 ___ Some Doctorate ___ Doctorate
 ___ Post-doctorate
Other: _____

Occupation: _____

Title: _____

I have never watched a Relationship-Based Reality Television show ☐

THANK YOU!

Appendix B: The Interview



Interview Questions

1. In general, how would you describe the impact of television on our society in America?
2. Do you think it has a positive impact or a negative one?
3. How many hours a day do you watch television?
 - A. How many days a week?
4. What is the age range of the television watchers in your family?
5. For the most part, do you buy products you see advertised on television?
 - A. If yes, when do you see these advertisements? (i.e. primetime, daytime, morning)
 - B. If no, from what source are you more influenced? (i.e. newspapers, mailers, etc.)
6. Define for me the term "Reality TV".
7. Reality TV has become an enormous phenomenon in this country. Why do you think it has exploded as it did?
8. Do you watch reality - based programs?
 - A. If yes, why do you watch them and what are they?
 - B. If no, why not?
9. In general, what do you think the sociological impact of these shows is on our society?
10. What do you think the sociological impact of these shows is on dating age or younger women?



Appendix C: Nielson Ratings Chart Example

The following chart is an example of the research that the Nielson Media Research Group compiles on a regular basis. The chart below denotes prime-time viewership between March 1 – March 7, 2004. The shows listed include the ranking for the week, the amount of viewers for that particular show and the season-to-date ranking. An “X” denotes a one-time-only presentation.

#	Show	Network	Viewers
1. (2)	American Idol (Tuesday)	Fox	25.5
2. (5)	Survivor: All Stars	CBS	23.3
3. (1)	CSI: Crime Scene Investigation	CBS	22.7
4. (7)	The Apprentice	NBC	20.2
5. (9)	CSI: Miami	CBS	19.9
6. (X)	American Idol: Uncut	Fox	19.7
7. (3)	American Idol (Wednesday)	Fox	19.3
8. (11)	Everybody Loves Raymond	CBS	17.8
9. (12)	Without a Trace	CBS	17.5
10. (15)	Two and a Half Men	CBS	17.1
11. (4)	Friends	NBC	17
12. (X)	Princess Diana	NBC	16.8
13. (18)	Cold Case	CBS	16
14. (14)	Will & Grace	NBC	15.3
15. (21)	Law & Order: Criminal Intent	NBC	15
16. (13)	Law & Order	NBC	14.6
17. (46)	Average Joe: Hawaii	NBC	14.1
18. (21)	Stephen King's Kingdom Hospital	ABC	14.1
19. (29)	Fear Factor	NBC	13
20. (38)	Las Vegas	NBC	13

Source: Nielson Media Research, taken from <http://www.canoe.ca/TelevisionRatings>